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"JUMP TO IT AND STOP THINKING ABOUT the pictures!" snarled the drill sergeant of Rodney Ackland's schooldays. But Rodney Ackland never did stop thinking about "the pictures": he was, and has ruefully remained, screen-struck. The cinema was his first love, and though the theatre proved a kindlier mistress he pinned his hopes of heaven to the film studio door.

At 19, Rodney Ackland had had three plays presented in London; at 22, he was the first modern dramatist to be hailed as "the English Chekov". It was at this stage in his brilliant career that the studio door first opened to him—whereafter it proceeded to behave as giddily as the revolving door in an early Chaplin comedy, whisking him in (variously disguised as screen-writer, actor and director) and briskly slapping him out again with disconcerting regularity over a period of twenty-one demented years.

From his eminence as a playwright—he achieved fame with his original plays "Strange Orchestra" and "After October", and his equally acclaimed stage adaptations of stories by Hugh Walpole, Maugham and Dostoevsky—he can look back and laugh at the mad, sometimes merry, sometimes miserable time he spent in movies. His recollections, as set down by his friend Elspeth Grant, film critic and columnist, are hilarious and star-spangled—packed with stories of such celebrities as D. W. Griffith, Alfred Hitchcock, Garbo, Greer Garson, Stewart Granger, James Mason, Leonora Corbett, Tallulah Bankhead,

Lillian Gish, Valerie Hobson, Emylyn Williams, John Gielgud, Wilfrid Lawson, Noël Coward, Sally Ann Howes, Ingrid Bergman, Anton Dolin, Margaret Lockwood, Michael Rennie, Hermione Gingold and Paulette Goddard, to choose at random a few names from the "cast of thousands".

Collaboration, between famous dramatist and well-known journalist, both noted for their wit, has produced the year's liveliest piece of reading in the biographical field. It is illustrated by a wide range of amusing and unconventional photographs, and "stills".

THE CELLULOID MISTRESS

Plays by Rodney Ackland

STRANGE ORCHESTRA
DANCE WITH NO MUSIC
THE DARK RIVER
AFTER OCTOBER
IMPROPER PEOPLE
BIRTHDAY
PLOT TWENTY-ONE
CUPID AND MARS

(in collaboration with Robert G. Newton)

THE PINK ROOM
BEFORE THE PARTY
(based on a short story by W. Somerset Maugham)

Dramatizations

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
THE OLD LADIES
BALLERINA

Adaptations

DIARY OF A SCOUNDREL
(based on a comedy by Ostrovsky)
THE WHITE GUARD
(from THE DAYS OF THE TURBINS by Fyodor Bulgakov)



"THAT IS MY FIANCÉE . . ."

THEY were sitting behind. (Lil Dagover in the opening scene of "Caligari")

THE CELLULOID MISTRESS

or

The Custard Pie of Dr. Caligari

BY

RODNEY ACKLAND & ELSPETH GRANT



LONDON

ALLAN WINGATE

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Authors' Note

It is generally understood that an autobiographical work must be either, as the title page announces, "by So-and-So" the "I" of the story (in this case, Rodney Ackland), or that it has been "ghosted" by somebody else. In case, therefore, readers should be baffled as to how a volume of personal reminiscences could be written "by So-and-So *and* Somebody Else," the answer is that on "The Celluloid Mistress or The Custard-Pie of Dr. Caligari," we collaborated in the true sense of the word, our working method being the most usual and well-tried one between collaborators—each of us, after a discussion of the incidents to be described, writing a section separately and then swapping what we had "done" for mutual criticism and comment. After this we would make whatever revisions seemed needful either for veracity's sake or to achieve and stick to a unity of style.

We are grateful to the British Film Institute for the "stills" from its library which illustrate the book.

RODNEY ACKLAND AND ELSPETH GRANT.

Any umbrage that may conceivably be taken at certain expressions of opinion in this book, on persons living or dead, and "pictures" talking or silent, is of course, my responsibility alone. The fact that Miss Grant often—but not always—shared these opinions is entirely coincidental.

RODNEY ACKLAND.

I

TO ELSTREE THROUGH THE BOTTOM DRAWER

"Fate Was At Her Loom..."

On my thirteenth birthday I was given the choice of two birthday treats: Lorna and Toots Pounds in Albert de Courville's "Rockets" on the stage of the Palladium, or Lillian and Dorothy Gish in D. W. Griffith's "Orphans of the Storm" on the screen of the Scala Theatre. I chose the screen.

It is impossible to say how Mr. de Courville's pyrotechnics might have affected me and my ambition. The effect of Mr. Griffith's film was immediate, overwhelming and lasting. In the cinema I spilt a box of chocolates over the lady sitting in front of me. (When she emerged from the cloaking dark of the upper circle, did she, I wonder, find her beige coat leopard-marked with chocolate stains?) On the way home I caused a most unbirthday-like atmosphere of disapproval by forgetting to offer my bus-seat to another lady. My mother forgave me—she knew I was so busy with my thoughts, I had scarcely realized I was *in* a bus.

An implacable resolve was forming in my mind. I knew now what I wanted to do when I grew up. I would be a film director.

My previous ideas for a dazzling future had all been of acting for the cinema: from the success of Jackie Coogan and Baby Marie Osborne it was clear that there was no necessity to grow up for this. I now relegated these ideas to second place—but they crept back somehow, to merge with my shining brand new idea into a single composite daydream: I saw myself starring in a film directed by Griffith.

"Fate," however, as the sub-titles of those days were persistently reminding us, "was busy at her loom"—and when at last I managed to achieve a screen part (though hardly a star one) it turned out to be in a film directed by Albert de Courville.

Fate must have been putting in some overtime at the loom that

day and weaving away like a mad thing, for in the pattern of my subsequent life—a rather loud check, there are many threads run directly back to that thirteenth-birthday treat.

“Locked Out”

It was one thing to decide at the age of thirteen that I would become a film director and another to find out how to set about it. How did one get inside a film studio?

Something had given me the impression that all film studios were situated in Wardour Street, so one day, after telling my mother that I was off to the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, to Wardour Street I went. My sister, Kay, came with me. She, too, was film-struck though difficult to cast as she could only visualize herself in Tom Mix roles, galloping across the plains waving her sombrero and calling “Goodbye, Pearl !” to Pearl White. She was then fifteen and I was thirteen and a half.

We wandered up and down Wardour Street trying to catch the eyes of possible film producers and hoping to be “discovered.” Nobody paid us the slightest attention—except a lounging errand boy who pointed rudely at Kay’s multi-coloured cloche hat (a fairly startling piece of headgear, I admit) and shouted, “Where d’jer get the fireworks?”

After two or three hours of profitless prowling we decided to change our tactics and marched into the offices of Paramount Pictures. A commissionaire who appeared to be nine feet tall asked us in a rumbling voice what we wanted. We were quite overcome and rushed out again, tripping each other up in our confusion as we flung ourselves through the doorway. A lean black cat, who eyed us sardonically as we sorted ourselves out, made off when we approached it to stroke it “for luck.” We concluded that this was not our day—and went ruefully home.

We tried Wardour Street on several occasions, invariably without result. People we were convinced were producers for whom we could make a fortune did not even notice us as they brushed by. “Blind fools !” we were tempted to cry, dramatically—but we were not quite sure of ourselves : the fact that no-one gave us so much as a glance had left us with the uncomfortable feeling that perhaps we had become invisible. We gave Wardour Street up.

A few weeks later we came across a newspaper reference to “the

Stoll Studios at Cricklewood." Explaining to our mother that the Natural History Museum again claimed our attention, we set off excitedly by bus to Cricklewood.

I do not know whether we had expected so magical a place as a film studio to be a magnificent building with domes and minarets—but I remember we were surprised to find the Stoll Studios looked bleakly unromantic and rather like an aeroplane hangar. We peeped in at the main entrance: two doormen were on guard inside. We had not the courage to try to dash past them and were too shy to ask if they would allow us to look into the studio. We just hung about hoping to see a film star in the flesh—Matheson Lang, perhaps, or Eille Norwood whom we had seen on the screen in the Sherlock Holmes series.

Suddenly we heard one doorman say to the other, "So I says to him, you go round to the back, young feller, I says." We looked at each other ("Hope renewed!" the sub-title should read) and sped to the rear of the building. There, sure enough, was a back door.

We stood breathless beside it for a moment—and then Kay very gently turned the door-handle and pressed against the door. It remained closed. Perhaps it opened outwards? She gave it a pull. It did not move. The door was locked and as firmly barred against hopeful talent as any Victorian portal against the misunderstood heroine. We knew just how she felt.

We were walking dejectedly away when Kay had an idea: maybe we could *break in*! We returned to the door and peeped into the keyhole. The key was there. We pushed it out and heard it fall with a clang to the floor within. We clutched one another: surely somebody inside must have heard it, too, and would come to investigate. Nobody came.

We tried to open the door with a couple of keys Kay had and the winding key which I had forgotten to replace on top of the bedroom clock when last entrusted with the job of putting it right. We probed the keyhole with pencils—which broke—and a promising piece of old wire—which merely folded up shabbily on us.

Came the rain. Kay suggested that if we banged on the door and shouted the studio people would probably take pity on us and let us in out of the wet. We banged. We shouted. There was positively no response. Invisible in Wardour Street, we were

apparently inaudible in Cricklewood.

We trudged through a steady downpour to the bus stop, too miserable to notice we were drenched. My mother, however, noticed it when we arrived home. She remarked that the Natural History Museum must be horribly damp these days: we looked as if we had come out of an aquarium. We were a little ashamed—and also we had spent every penny of our pocket-money on bus fares—so we “told all.”

“Well, what a couple of sillics you are!” said my mother, after ordering us to change out of our wet clothes before we caught our deaths of cold as if she hadn’t trouble enough. “If you’d told me you wanted to see the inside of a film studio, instead of telling me fibs about the museum, I’m sure I could have arranged it for you. I know somebody who works on the films.”

We stared at Mother, quite dazed. To think of it! Our own mother knew a film-actress! Not that we weren’t used to ladies who trod, or had trodden, “the boards,” friends of Mother’s in eccentric hats who had been with her in “The Belle of New York” or “The French Maid” or “Jack and the Beanstalk,” but someone *on the pictures* was a very different thing! “Who is it, Mummie?”

“It’s Miss Dudley,” said my mother. “She works as an ‘extra’ when there’s a film about very distinguished people, very *well-bred* people, I mean.”

This we could well understand, for Miss Dudley, though by no means rich, had a great air of elegance and distinction and Kay and I, who were a little in awe of her, had long known that she was the daughter of an Admiral. What we could not understand was that Miss Dudley had kept her glamorous employment such a dark secret.

“I suppose she doesn’t want people to think she’s a *film actress*,” said Mother. *Not want people to . . . !* Miss Dudley, we realized, must be mad. But that didn’t matter. “When will you ask her to take us to a studio?” we asked Mummie, anxiously.

“It all depends whether you’re *good* or not,” she replied and, as we hastened to mollify her by tearing off our wet things, “Perhaps next time I see her and if she’s in a film I’m sure she’ll take you. She’s a very kind old thing.”

Either my mother did not see Miss Dudley very frequently, or Miss Dudley did not work very regularly: weeks, even months,

went empty by for us, and when at last the joyous moment came when Miss Dudley could definitely promise us a visit to a film studio, Kay, who had joined the training school for Tiller Girls, was no longer free to go. But *I* was—and I went, with, truthfully, the happiest thoughts of being able to tell Kay “the inside story,” so that she, too, would know what it was like to tread “the floor” (as distinct from “the boards”).

Miss Dudley was working at the St. Margaret’s studios, near Twickenham; she was, I gathered, adorning the crowd scenes in a film called “The Shadow of Egypt,” starring Alma Taylor and Henry Edwards, but from the grand manner in which she swept me past the studio doorman—bestowing on him a nod, distant but benign—one felt she should have been playing nothing less than second lead.

“Now, just keep perfectly quiet and don’t talk to anybody: I’ll be back shortly,” said Miss Dudley, gliding off majestically to the dressing-rooms or wardrobe, leaving me in a dark corner. I was enthralled. Electric cables crawled snakelike across the floor, lights blazed down, Cockney voices shouted things like “We’ll bash the arc this time, Fred!”—and most of the bustle seemed concentrated around a large but flimsy piece of scenery propped up with its back to me. I edged round the studio floor to get a front view—and there before my enchanted eyes were Alma Taylor, Henry Edwards and several minor players with some shirt-sleeved gentlemen, one of whom was apparently explaining how the scene was to be played.

“Let’s have a run through,” said this obviously important person—and the players re-grouped themselves. I had just time to note that they all seemed to be suffering from jaundice (they were wearing the flat yellow make-up then in fashion) when there was a commotion on the set—Miss Taylor summoning the technicians to her and becoming charmingly “difficult.”

The directorial gentleman suddenly bellowed, “Miss Taylor can’t act with strangers on the set. Get that boy out of here!” Without a moment’s ado or a single word, I was smartly conducted from the studios. The door clanged to behind me. I was again locked out—and I could have wept. Looking back on the incident, I can’t really blame Miss Taylor for her attitude. Scarlet-faced, open-mouthed and pop-eyed with excitement, I daresay I was a pretty unnerving sight for a sensitive artist.

It took me a little time to recover from my humiliation, but eventually, of course, I did—and though I still clung to my resolve to get inside a film studio I resigned myself to the idea that perhaps a less direct method of approach was advisable.

“Three Years Later . . .”

To the unflattering astonishment of everybody except my family, I won a scholarship for a year's training under the famous and formidable Miss Elsie Fogerty at the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art. The year before I went there Peggy Ashcroft and Laurence Olivier had been pupils at the school. Although everybody talked in awed tones of “Ashcroft”—surnames were the rule—and how “absolutely marvellous” she had been in the exams., it wasn't possible at that time to appreciate what I had missed by not achieving the scholarship a year earlier.

As it turned out, 1927 was not a very distinguished year at the Central School: it produced only one star actress and certainly no star actors. The actress was Ann Todd.

Miss Todd was a three-year student in her final year, so I did not often meet her. She was already regarded as a young actress of unusual talent and I was scared of her: she seemed to me grumpy-looking and unapproachable. That was a first impression which I was later to revise.

I was scared, too, of Miss Fogerty, in the beginning—but, then, I think, everybody was. She could be ferocious. I remember one awful occasion when, probably because I had not properly prepared a lesson, I cut a class and was having a quiet cup of tea in the canteen. Suddenly the voice of “Foge,” as we called her, rang out: “Ackland! Report to your class *at once!*” She followed me into the classroom and, in front of all the pupils, addressed me loudly and witheringly: “Cutting a class!” she cried, dramatically. “You, of all people—a *scholarship boy!*” I was covered with shame—and for a moment I positively hated her.

Dear “Foge”! Nobody could hate her for long. She was full of fire and contagious enthusiasm and even if she slew you, it was, as you discovered in after life (having been frequently slain I am a firm believer in after life), in the best of causes: it was, in fact, for your own good. Besides, the moment “Foge” turned her

back upon you, you simply had to forgive her her sharp words : from the front, particularly when she flashed her eyes and threw back her head, she could appear a proud, arrogant and even forbidding old woman, but her rear view always seemed to me pathetic and endearing for a worn petticoat, which you felt sure was fastened with a safety-pin, drooped dejectedly under her skirt and the heels of her stockings were full of holes. Such trifles never bothered her—she was far too concerned with the success of her pupils.

As end of term drew near, I was shaken to find myself down to play Paolo to Ann Todd's Francesca in Stephen Phillips' play. Miss Fogerty had her own methods of coping with nervous tension: for several rehearsals she made me play the love scene, which was our test piece, lying flat on my back on the stage in order to relax. I doubt if a love scene has ever looked funnier.

A week or two before the exams. Ann caused a tremendous stir. She was tested for a film. It appeared likely that I should have to play with another Francesca—but Ann was not to have her chance in films that time.

The news was broken by Miss Fogerty who, assembling the pupils in the school theatre, told us, contempt for the cinema and all connected with it curling her lips, that "dear Ann" had not got the part after all : it had been given to "a person calling herself Merle Oberon." "Fogc," loyal and direct as she was, had nothing against Miss Oberon personally—but she made it clear that she objected to the name and didn't believe in a syllable of it.

Rehearsals with Ann, who was perhaps more determined than ever to score as an *actress* in her final exams., went on. I was desperately anxious to be equal to her.

At the dress rehearsal, I was standing in the wings waiting to make my entrance when suddenly, in the dark, an ice-cold hand was laid on mine and warm lips touched my ear breathing "Francesca, Francesca!" I was so startled, I rushed on to the stage and fell flat. "Foge" told me subsequently that she felt I was afraid of that cool Ann Todd and had simply wanted to give me a conviction of such burning love that all ice must inevitably melt.

Miss Todd and I, though we never became close friends, shared (which is a binding experience) a common anger and frustration over the exam. Having rehearsed Paolo and Francesca until we

were black in the face we found ourselves literally so "on the night": something had gone wrong with the footlights and the audience and examiners couldn't see us at all.

I didn't really know Ann Todd until years later—the year after the war, in fact, when she, her then husband, Nigel Tangye, and I were fellow passengers aboard the *Queen Mary*, Canada bound. I make no excuse for skipping through time to tell of this encounter for during it Ann became the human as well as brilliant person I know her to be.

The *Queen Mary* was still, in the bitterest sense, a military ship—that is to say she was taking a large contingent of war brides to their new homes and, because the behaviour of a previous contingent had resulted in a number of them being turned back as "undesirable citizens," everybody, including the handful of "civilian" passengers, had to be in their cabins by ten o'clock and the ship was strictly "dry."

Ann, whom I was astonished to find aboard, invited me to a drink with Nigel in their cabin in deepest secrecy. I realized then that what I had labelled in her as "Unapproachableness" was something that, at seventeen, I had not been able to recognize as a shyness equal to my own. I do not know whose foresight it was that had furnished a small but generously shared supply of alcohol: I do know that, without it and the amiable company Ann and her husband provided, the voyage could have been torture.

We hit what was said to be the worst storm the *Queen Mary* had ever struck. Brides lay moaning all over the decks, wishing they had never met that Canadian at the Palais de Danse, while, in a vain effort to keep up their spirits, loud-speakers everywhere broadcast a record of "Colonel Bogey" with its well-known refrain permanently associated with the ribald chorus of "— —! and the same to you!"

We arrived at Halifax in a depressing drizzle and the welcome band was playing—believe it or not—"Colonel Bogey." A rude welcome to say the least! We heard one war bride, lifting up her squeaking offspring to see the land of its fathers, sum up what seemed to be the general verdict of the immigrants with a simple *cri du cœur*: "Blimey, what a bloody awful place!" Ann burst out laughing. "Foge herself couldn't have spoken that line with more feeling," she said. She was gay and pretty and full of life. And I couldn't understand why I had ever felt intimidated by her.

Soon after the Central School exams. I got a job with Dame Sybil Thorndike's brother, Russell, to go on tour in his smuggling melodrama, "Doctor Syn." Russell is the most congenial and friendly person and was on the best of terms with every member of the cast. The snooty management seemed to consider this all wrong and whenever Russell was discovered chatting with the other actors, would invent excuses to drag him away.

Coming upon me one day when I was laughing with Russell backstage, the management gave me a severe ticking off, instructing me to try and realize that the theatre was a serious business—and adding that I mustn't wear plimsols on train calls.

The truth was, of course, that I still looked upon the stage merely as a means of breaking into the film studios and when, a few weeks later, we were playing Wigan I took another step in the desired direction.

Finding myself in my twenty-five shillings a week "all-in" bed-sitter with nothing to read, I opened the bottom drawer of the rickety chest of drawers and took out the paper that lined it. One of the news items in this faded sheet told of the suicide pact between two lovers who lacked the money on which to marry. It gave me the idea for a play in which I would tell the truth about living without money in the suburbs—a subject on which I felt I could speak with authority. I sat down and started writing—thinking that if I could make any sort of reputation as a playwright it would then not be so difficult to land a contract to direct films. The play was called "Improper People."

"The Gloom of Youth"

I had known Terence de Marney since we were both boys queueing up at theatrical agents for the same part—which Terence always got—so when I had finished the play (it took far longer to write than, in the first flush of inspiration, I had imagined) I showed it to him. He in turn showed it to his brother, Derek. Eighteen months later, having found the backing to put on a play at the Arts Theatre, Terry and Derek presented my first piece. Marjorie Mars and Esmond Knight played the suicidal lovers and I thought their performances most moving. I was conscious of a lump in my throat as I watched them.

Terry, Derek and I were feverishly anxious to see the reviews.

and waited up until the first morning papers were on sale. Terry had, he reported, detected a certain gloom among the critics—still, we hoped somebody would have a good word to say for us. It was not so.

The gentlemen of the Press considered it very depressing that a play put on by so youthful a management and written by a dramatist in his teens should be so morbid. One of them found it "nearly as boring as Tchekov." If the critics were depressed at having to sit through my play, I was certainly even more depressed by their reception of it. I felt simply terrible. The critics were not entirely to blame—for (and I cannot tell you how disillusioning this was) what I had believed to be an emotional lump in the throat turned out to be merely the beginning of a smart attack of tonsillitis. Fretting and fuming and running a raging temperature, I was forced to take to my bed. That first performance of my first play was the only one I saw.

I was prepared to die—the unrecognized genius. It took no more than a few adverse comments to make me feel, as it still does, that life was not worth living—but fortunately I was still alive on the third day after the first night and able to read a letter, forwarded to me from the theatre, which cured me of my dumps in a flash. It was from John van Druten, praising my play warmly and congratulating me in the most charming manner on having produced a first work of such excellence.

I was immensely flattered. My temperature fell and my spirits rose—and positively rocketed when a review by Ivor Brown, who had not been present at the première but had taken the trouble to see a later performance, appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*. It was a long and enormously encouraging review. Mr. Brown had paid me the compliment of taking my play seriously and had understood precisely what I had intended to convey. You can imagine with what a glow of pride I read such lines as "Mr. Ackland is an observer . . . he turns his dialogue well and his characters are vital . . ." and "this play has immensely more value than nine out of ten West End productions . . ."

I blessed Ivor Brown with all my heart—and to this day I think playwrights should give thanks for a critic whom no-one could ever accuse of prejudice or malice, and who genuinely loves the theatre.

Whether because of this kindly review, or because of scattered

expressions of interest in what I naturally felt to be the more intelligent "weeklies," I cannot say—but, anyway, Heinemann's offered to publish the play. I agreed enthusiastically: I was still ingenuous enough to toy with the exhilarating thought that once the play was in print some film studio executive was bound to read it and would send for me straight away.

I told Heinemann's of the van Druten letter and was asked to bring it in for their publicity department to see: they wanted to use extracts to advertise "Improper People" in the spring catalogue.

On my way to the publishers I dropped in at the Arts Theatre to chat with friends. I explained my errand and hoped they would ask to see the letter. They did. My gratification turned to dismay as I went through pocket after pocket: the precious letter was not to be found.

I was for a moment appalled. Then, determined not to be thwarted by this piece of bad luck or forgetfulness, I rather guiltily wrote myself an appreciative paragraph: I handed it in to the publisher's office saying I had copied it word for word from the distinguished playwright's letter. The paragraph—a pleasing one—was accepted and I thought I had dealt most efficiently with an awkward situation. I had not realized that even if the "quotation" had been genuine I should have asked van Druten's permission to use it.

When the paragraph duly appeared in the spring catalogue, John van Druten wrote to me in terms which one would definitely not want to see in any catalogue advertising one's work. Perhaps it was because of this episode that, years later, he was heard to remark: "I tremendously admire Rodney's plays but it's such a pity he doesn't know how to behave."

"Pursued by Peers"

Meanwhile I had returned to acting and was playing "Young Woodley" in the provinces with Leonora Corbett as Laura, the schoolmaster's wife with whom Woodley was in love. I found her an enchanting person and was by no means unique in this

Prior to joining our company, Leonora had been at the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, and had created on the local undergraduates something of the same impression as Zuleika Dobson on the

Oxford undergraduates in Max Beerbohm's book.

For love of Zuleika, you may remember, a horde of susceptible young men, most of them titled, committed mass-suicide. Because of Leonora, a horde of equally susceptible young men, mostly titled, risked what might have been social suicide by being seen coming out of fish and chip shops in places like Crewe and Walsall, whither they had pursued her, bearing steaming, greasy newspaper parcels back to Leonora's digs after the show.

On one occasion a peer, carrying out his orders to "go and get enough fish and chips for three" and basing his ideas on the charges in West End restaurants, asked for "thirty shillings' worth." At this period a large piece of fried cod was fourpence and a newspaper filled with chips cost twopence. When he arrived back at Leonora's digs it took nearly ten minutes to unload the taxi, which was piled to the roof with hot oily packages leaving hardly any room for the peer. During this tour I was writing my second play.

Leonora was to have a leading part in it: this was the least I could offer her by way of thanks for the gallant way in which she suffered with me the chi-iking and wolf whistles that invariably accompanied our love scenes on Saturday nights. She took them in her stride with the most enviable imperturbability: I, on the other hand, was infuriated by them. There was a memorable evening in Watford when these unseemly interruptions were particularly maddening: in the middle of embracing Leonora I suddenly turned to the audience and yelled "Shut up!" When I took her in my arms again, I could feel Leonora shaking with laughter, which made me want to laugh, too—and we had to prolong our clinch for far longer than the film censor would allow while we regained our composure.

Wherever the tour led us Leonora and I used to try to get digs in the same house and if possible to share a sitting-room. We were usually successful—and in an atmosphere of aspidistras, coloured prints of horrible ringletted children being "Saved!" by St. Bernard dogs, firemen, or guardian angels, and of welsh-rarebits or fish and chips for supper, we made our separate but equally ambitious plans for the future.

Many years later I saw Leonora again, this time in her luxurious apartment in the Waldorf Astoria Towers, New York, just after her performance as the ghost in "Blithe Spirit" on Broadway had been widely and wildly acclaimed. She had been married to

Mr. John Royal, the head of the National Broadcasting Corporation, and the marriage had been dissolved—but among the bouquets and orchids continually arriving for her, the largest and most glamorous would be, as likely as not, from her ex-husband.

With a fabulous vista of skyscrapers to be seen from any of the wide windows, with the secretaries and French maids, with the mink coats carelessly abandoned on couches and discarded diamonds glittering nonchalantly on the chimney piece, the apartment was exactly like the set for an unconvincing play about a famous actress.

We had cocktails together until her escort for the evening arrived to whisk her off to dine. As we were leaving, Leonora paused in the doorway and glanced round the apartment. "I love living here," she said, with a perfectly straight face and a silky drawl: "It's just like theatrical digs!"

It was, I believe, while we were in Manchester and rooms far from glamorous, that I finished my second play. It was called "Marion-Ella," contained a part for Leonora, opened in a girls' school, and dealt with the unhappy plight of a girl who realized she was half of a divided personality.

When this play was presented in due course at the Players' Theatre, it left most of the Press cold—and baffled. *The Times* wrote, "Some day it may amuse Mr. Ackland to remember that he wrote 'Marion-Ella.'" It amuses me even more to recall that one critic commented: "It is not easy to tell whether the work should be taken seriously or not, as it may be genius." What remarkable candour in a critic—to admit that he doesn't know what he or the playwright is talking about!

For some reason—probably because I had acquired a greater resilience, or perhaps because I had not myself been entirely satisfied with the play—I was not cast down by the notices. I was, in any case, already busy on a new play—the very one, as it turned out, that was to open the film studio door to me at last.

"The Hero from St. Trinian's"

The play's title was "Dance With No Music" and I had written the leading part especially for Leonora. The role was that of a sexy young actress playing in a seaside repertory company and Leonora was vastly pleased with it. The management who de-

cided to present the play at the Arts Theatre were, however, not at all pleased with the idea of giving the lead to an "unknown" actress. They were for having "a name."

The "name" they suggested was Madeleine Carroll, who had already made a success in films. I'd been told that Miss Carroll was a Birmingham school-teacher and an M.A., and the part seemed to me highly unsuitable for anyone with such a background. I argued and argued in favour of Leonora for whom, after all, it was designed and who could, as I said, play it on her head. This interesting prospect held no appeal for the management—they remained adamant. Miss Corbett, they said, could play the heroine's friend if she wished—and this Leonora, as good a loser as she was a friend, agreed to do. Madeleine Carroll was given the lead and Roland Culver was cast as the unpleasant man she marries. An unknown actress named Kay Hammond had a very minor role.

After the first rehearsal I realized that I had no cause to worry about Madeleine Carroll's ability or adaptability—and this was a great relief as there were several other things to worry about if one were so disposed.

Auriol Lee produced the play. The only woman producer at that time, Auriol had her own eccentric methods of production and a disconcerting habit of going to sleep during rehearsals. Charged with this one day, Auriol assured me that waking or sleeping she was *at work*: I had a brief vision of her busily occupied, during her forty winks, with half a dozen quite enthralling productions on the astral plane.

The last act consisted mostly of a long emotional scene between Madeleine and the young man who played her lover. I considered it important that this should be handled with the greatest care and delicacy. Auriol said brightly, "The last act is so difficult, darling, that I'm not going to rehearse it!" Perhaps it was because of this that James Agate in his *Sunday Times* review, after praising Madeleine for "a very fine and well controlled emotional performance," went on to say, "the young lover looked as though he had just come out of a girls' school where he had been horribly bullied by his pigtailed classmates."

The first night of "Dance With No Music" was smart enough for Tallulah Bankhead and her friend Audrey Carten to be present. During one of Madeleine's scenes in the first act, a woman sitting just behind them said in an audible whisper, "Isn't she

exactly like Tallulah Bankhead used to be ?" Miss Carten, unaware that the woman was referring to Madeleine, turned round and, while Tallulah went into fits of laughter, said, "But this is Tallulah Bankhead." The woman looked utterly mystified and leant forward saying, "What . . . ?" But by this time everybody round them was "sh-sh-sh-ing" like hard-pressed soda water siphons and further conversation had to be postponed until the interval. When it came, Tallulah turned to the woman behind and demanded to know what had been said about her. It looked like the beginning of an unpleasant incident. "But I don't understand. Who are you?" said the woman. Tallulah told her—and was obviously entertained by the excitement, confusion and apologies that followed. She became all smiles and graciousness. "Oh, please don't apologize," she said. "I'm very pleased to be compared to Madeleine Carroll—I think she's *perfectly lovely*."

The small part that Kay Hammond had in "Dance With No Music" was that of an inexpressibly dumb young repertory actress. As this inconsiderable character she had to refer to Laura Smithson, who played Madeleine's mother, in terms of good-natured contempt. I can't remember what expression was given her in the original script but at rehearsals Kay suggested, "Couldn't I call her the Sausage Queen?" On the first night, when Kay trailed on to the stage and said in her rich, pouty drawl, "I rushed on ahead so as not to have to talk to the Sausage Queen," it brought the house down. The line was neither witty nor funny, the description of this particular character as "The Sausage Queen" quite meaningless, but something about the way it was delivered achieved an excruciatingly comic effect. It would be no exaggeration to say that Kay could have an audience rolling in the aisles merely by reading aloud from a telephone directory. I like to think that the revelation of her extraordinary gift in this one line of "Dance With No Music" was the beginning of Kay Hammond's career as a star. In any case, shortly after the play she was engaged to appear in the English version of a film being shot at the UFA Studios in Berlin. I was very happy for Kay at the time and later on I was glad on my own account, for her reports of manners and customs in the German capital were to enliven what would otherwise have been some of the duller days of my life when the studio doors were opened to me.

II

BORSTAL DAYS WITH HITCHCOCK

"Something Wonderful Happens . . ."

The reviews of "Dance With No Music" were stimulating. James Agate, verging on enthusiasm, applauded my ability to create new characters and to write for the stage, Ivor Brown found the third act "an exquisite piece of light and shade," most of the other critics gave the impression that earlier promise had here, at least partially, been fulfilled—and one of the glossy weeklies won my heart by going so far as to describe the piece as "one of the best plays of the year." Now, I thought to myself, I'm getting somewhere.

I did not know at that time that film companies are smart enough to send their own representatives to see and report upon every play that is put on in London—and I felt the moment had come when I really should draw the attention of the movie moguls to my work. Abandoning my usual policy of putting off till tomorrow anything that should have been done yesterday, I sat down one morning and wrote a letter to B.I.P. (British International Pictures—a name that struck me as quaint and contradictory) at Elstree. I dashed out, bought a stamp, sent the letter off and returned home—to find that, by the second post, a letter had arrived for me from B.I.P., asking me to see their Mr. Walter Mycroft with a view to an appointment.

I could have kicked myself and for a moment trifled with the idea of going to the post office and asking for my letter back—but only for a moment. The incident persuaded me that if one is blessed with a dilatory disposition one should resign oneself to it: it is sheer folly and leads to no good to fly in the face of nature. Many years later Dame Edith Evans told me she thought it a great mistake to go out in pursuit of work and success: "You must sit back quietly and let them *flow* to you," she said in her lilting voice—and as work and success have consistently flowed to her, she has

certainly every reason to believe she is right.

I went to the studios at Elstree bursting with excitement. At the studio gates, a commissionaire popped out of a sort of sentry box and asked what I wanted. I said rather grandly that I had an appointment with Mr. Mycroft and was admitted, with instructions to go straight on past the canteen (a shed-like building that looked remarkably uninviting but, in months to come, turned out to be a refuge for which one was profoundly grateful) to the main studio building, a barn of a place, where I would find Mr. Mycroft's office.

His office was unimpressive: I suppose I had expected a vast room with acres of lush carpet, a desk the size of a tennis court and a profusion of flowers and telephones, so I was vaguely disappointed to find my first movie mogul seated at an ordinary desk in a smallish, workaday office with only one telephone and rows of undecorative filing cabinets lining the walls. It looked, in fact, just like an office in any commercial concern. I wonder now why I was surprised.

Mr. Mycroft was affable and businesslike and came to the point at once: B.I.P. were willing to take me on as a screen writer at a salary of eight pounds ten a week. He made it clear that, in view of my lack of experience in this field and the fact that I would be learning the whole business of film making, he considered this a handsome offer which I would be a fool to refuse. He need not have bothered—I was only too eager to accept. I assured him this was what I had been waiting for all my life—and I have a suspicion (a little uncharitable) that the idea crossed his mind that he could have hired me at half the price. However, he stuck to his offer and the deal was clinched. I floated out through the studio gates with my head in the clouds.

"The Following Monday..."

When next I presented myself at Elstree, the guardian of the studio gates again emerged from his box to bark, "What d'you want?" "I work here now," I said proudly. "You'll be seeing me every day." I was startled and dashed at the look that came into his eyes: it said, as plainly as words, "Poor young devil!"

Within the studio building, behind the door that had at last opened to me, I found an efficient secretary who conducted me up

a flight of stairs and along a gallery actually overlooking the studio floor (though there was nothing to see as the sound stages were enclosed) to the tiny office that was to be mine, and in which I was to bear my abortive brain children and eat my heart out. For the moment, however, not being gifted with second sight, I was happy.

The little office had once been occupied by Frank Launder, who had, I gathered, been promoted to something rather more spacious. The filing cabinets still contained his reports on plays he had seen in London. Feverishly I looked to see if he had ever noticed any of my works. He had—and I spent a blissful half-hour reading and re-reading his comments on my three plays. Mr. Launder, I felt, fully deserved his promotion: he had first recognized me as “a very young dramatist of promise” and his subsequent remarks became more and more flattering. He praised my perceptiveness, character drawing and originality of theme, and gave (to me, at least) the impression that I was a compound Ibsen and Chekov. I concluded that Frank Launder must be an absolutely delightful as well as exceptionally intelligent fellow—and though I had arrived at that conclusion out of purest vanity, I found when I met him, after my ego had suffered deflation, that it was, as a matter of fact, correct.

Dreamily I speculated as to what my first assignment for the studios would be. Since the bosses had presumably hired me on the strength of Frank Launder's recommendations, had they something specific in mind for me—a screen version, perhaps, of “Hedda Gabler” or “The Cherry Orchard”? They would, I hoped, give me something subtle to work on—something, above all, profound. But like “most gentlemen” in the Cole Porter song, most movie moguls can't (or don't want to) be profound.

They gave me “The Black Hand Gang” to write. It was to be a comedy thriller, about a bunch of “Dead End” kids, starring Wee Georgie Wood and directed by Monty Banks.

The Ibsen in me winced, the Chekov in me shuddered—and in my entirety I was utterly confounded and stunned. My mind went blank. I had no idea at all how to write a comedy thriller and fell into a mood of depression, feeling that nobody had ever before been so humiliatingly treated by the studios. I was quite wrong.

A great many script writers of my age went through the mill at Elstree and most of them seemed to suffer for a time. One who

did not was the ebullient Leslie Arliss who was cheerfully busy, tongue in cheek, on a work entitled "Strip, Strip, Hooray!" and had clearly mastered the art of deploying the bosses' clichés to everybody's satisfaction.

The rest of us were, perhaps, less adaptable or had shown dangerous signs of having an intellectual approach to the cinema and thus deserved to be rapped sharply over the noggin by the management to bring us to our senses. Although in retrospect it's all very funny, we were pretty gloomy at the time and inclined to regard our early apprenticeship to Elstree as our Borstal days.

I did eventually make a start on "The Black Hand Gang" and churned away at it solemnly day after day, with time off only for furtive visits to the canteen for coffee: I was afraid somebody would suddenly pounce on me and demand to see the script—but nobody ever did.

It was during one of these trips to the canteen that I again met Kay Hammond, who had just returned from her film job for UFA in Berlin. She seemed somewhat bewildered by her experiences there. It was two years before Hitler came to power and altered the German attitude towards sex. The Nazi persecutions were not directed only against Jews and socialists, as is generally believed, but also against sexual deviationists. Prior to Hitler, German sex laws were based on the findings of psycho-analysis and it was possible for a man who felt himself to be more female than male to get a psychiatrist's certificate stating that his was a genuine "case," after which it was perfectly in order for him to ignore the mistake made by nature at his birth. The same, of course, applied to women with male instincts. This was the existing state of affairs during Kay's stay in Berlin.

"It's *so* peculiar," she told me. "You never know what anybody *is* there. You're introduced to some attractive man and get to know him and then he turns out to be a woman—and practically all the girls you meet turn out to be really men."

The pre-Hitler Berliners found nothing shocking in sex. Kay told me that when visiting the Berlin Zoo she saw a large crowd milling in front of the gorilla cage. She joined it. Two gorillas were in the act of mating. Aunties up from the country watched with stolid interest while mothers of families hoisted their smallest shoulder high to get a better view. In the course of this instructive spectacle a man behind Kay tapped her on the shoulder. "Excuse

me, madam," he said politely, "would you mind removing your hat?"

The Berlin night spots were astoundingly frank in their eagerness to discover and gratify their customers' desires. Elspeth Grant confirms this. She and a woman friend dropped in at a place called "Femina," a feature of which was a small telephone on every table so that if you saw somebody attractive on the other side of the room you could call them up. No sooner had they seated themselves than their telephone rang: it was the management calling, to ask if they would care for a couple of gigolos. "No thank you," said E. G. replacing the receiver. A few minutes later the telephone rang again. The voice at the other end said, "You would perhaps prefer two ladies—very interesting, very amusing?" "No thank you," said E. G., ringing off. There was a pause—then the telephone rang for a third time and the management, with the air of putting forward a *specialité de la maison*, murmured that they had, too, a very nice line in small but succulent pageboys. "Let's get out of here before they offer us a goat!" said Elspeth's friend—and they fled.

I was about two-thirds of the way through my script of "The Black Hand Gang"—and feeling rather pleased with myself at having got so far—when, to my utter amazement, I discovered that the film was already being made. No-one had read my version of the story—no-one had told me that another was being written. I don't know whose script was used—perhaps they were just not using a script but making it up as they went along. Anyway, there was the film, actually "on the floor": there was Wee Georgie Wood disporting himself as a juvenile delinquent and there was Monty Banks excitably directing. I was allowed to stand around and watch them at work but nobody ever mentioned the fact that I had for weeks been scripting a film of the same name for the same star and director: my presence on the set was tolerated and that was something. I had always wanted to be allowed on to a set—and here I was.

Monty Banks at that time was married to Gladys Frazin, a large American actress covered in diamonds. It was well known in the studios that the tubby little Italian comedian was outdone in temperament by his wife and their stormy domestic life added obliquely but considerably to the excitement of seeing "The Black Hand Gang" filmed—for one never knew in what condition

Monty would turn up. Many were the mornings when he arrived with a black eye or a bandaged head—the result, as studio rumour went, of having been crowned with champagne bottles. Poor, violent Gladys Frazin was an unhappy woman: eventually she committed suicide and in due course Gracie Fields became the second Mrs. Monty Banks.

When the filming of Monty's film was finished, I drifted about the studios hoping to be given something to do. Nobody seemed to notice me and I began to experience again that wan sensation of invisibility that I had known in Wardour Street as a child. I felt I must make myself conspicuous in some way—I gave the matter quite a lot of thought and decided to ask my mother to dye my white shirts green. She thought I was crazy but she dyed them. They came out a deadly green which, under the studio lights, turned a very odd shade indeed. I was pleased for it seemed to me a colour that could not be overlooked—but the only person whose eye it ever caught was Ronald Frankau who one day looked at me with exaggerated signs of alarm and horror and cried: "My dear chap—what's the matter with your shirt? It's *livid*!" He was a friendly, jolly man so I explained about the shirt and told him my troubles. He laughed and told me I mustn't let the studios get me down: something for me would doubtless materialize in a few days and meantime why didn't I just go through my press cuttings? There was nothing like it, he assured me, for restoring one's sense of proportion.

I had always been very careless with my press cuttings—they were stuffed into a drawer at home—and it struck me it would be a good idea to bring them up to the office and paste them into a book. It was while I was engaged on this innocent and salutary job that I came upon a cutting that contained, I was convinced, the clue to B.I.P.'s treatment of me. Some misguided and to this day unidentified critic, reviewing "Dance With No Music," had written: "A bolder attempt to snatch the bread out of the mouth of the movies than was made in the last act . . . can seldom have been witnessed by astonished playgoers."

So that was it! The movie moguls had taken this wretched critic's word for it that I was trying to snatch the bread out of their mouths and had simply signed me on to put an end to that little game and to keep an eye on me! They didn't really want me to work for them—they just wanted to stop me from working against

them. I must go to Mr. Mycroft and tell him the critic was utterly mistaken : I had never had the slightest intention . . .

At that moment, while I was working myself into a fine frenzy, I was suddenly summoned to the office of one of the executives. "Oh, *there* you are!" he said briskly. "We've got Richard Eichberg from UFA over to make that musical—what's it called? 'Live, Love and Laugh'—in German and English. I want you to act as liaison between him and the script-writing department." "Liaison?" I asked, a little dazed. "Yes, yes, yes—you know, keep them in touch," he replied, and added shortly, "Well, that's all." Did he regard me as a potential bread-snatcher, or was he like that to everybody when he was busy? I really would have to bring up the question of that damned review some time—but this was obviously not the moment.

On the "Live, Love and Laugh" set I found Ronald Frankau who, with Gene Gerrard, was to supply comedy in the English version: I imagine it was he who suggested I should be attached to this film, though when I tried to thank him for mentioning me to some one or other he only laughed and said, "Nonsense! You got the job purely on merit." It was a job in name only. Herr Eichberg, who was able and stolid, apparently had no desire for any liaison with the script department—he simply accepted the material they sent him and did the best he could with it.

He seemed rather dubious about our English humour. In one scene in the English version, Gene Gerrard picked up a hairbrush, gazed at the bristled side as into a hand-mirror, stroked his chin and said, "Golly! I certainly need a shave!" Herr Eichberg watched this piece of "business" solemnly. "Again," he said—and Gene repeated the gag while the director studied him with a perplexed frown. Then Herr Eichberg drew me aside and asked incredulously, "Is das a *yope*?" I assured him that it was indeed a joke—one that since hairbrushes first came in had always raised a laugh in this country. Herr Eichberg wagged his head and shrugged—he found the English very odd but, frankly, not very funny.

The German cast for "Live, Love and Laugh," headed by Marta Eggert, was exceedingly professional and well-drilled—far more so than most of the British cast, and for some reason (possibly because I didn't understand a word of the language) the German songs seemed far less fatuous than those in the English version.



MY MOTHER AS A BASKET OF FLOWERS

At the Folies Bergères in 1903—many years before she became
“stocking conscious”



THE POUNDESSES OR THE GISHES ?

" I CHOSE THE SCREEN "

*(above) Lorna and Toots Pounds in
" Rockets "*

*(below) Lillian and Dorothy Gish in
" Orphans of the Storm "*



There was one chorus number about life's alphabet which sounded really good in German. In English the opening line ran "A. B. C., A. B. C., learn the way to love." As yapped by the dispirited chorus, it was quite pathetically silly. It has stuck in my mind because Herr Eichberg caught me, in one of my dispirited moments, singing to myself, "B. I. P., B. I. P., learn the way to love!" He looked at me with his head on one side, half smiled and murmured something: I could almost swear it was "Optimist!" I liked Herr Eichberg—he was a pleasant, even-tempered man and though he didn't understand our sense of humour he was not without one of his own.

Incidentally, quite recently I was talking to Victor Skutetsky, the A.B.P. producer, who had known the German director well. He told me Herr Eichberg had died two years ago while staying at a large hotel in Germany. This hotel, Victor said, strongly disapproves of guests dying on the premises and has its own somewhat macabre method of dealing with anyone who is tactless enough to do so—for the other guests must, at all costs, never be disturbed by the horrid thought that Death has passed amongst them. A gang of furniture removers carrying chairs, tables and a large divan arrived in Herr Eichberg's suite, ostensibly to re-equip it. Nobody thought it odd that, a little later, a large divan was carried out: nobody suspected that in it Herr Eichberg was being borne discreetly away. Poor Herr Eichberg—did his wondering spirit ask, "Is das a yope?"

Some years after "Live, Love and Laugh" was finished, I was again at a loose end. Wandering idly about the Denham studios one day, I was enthusiastically greeted by a voluptuous Nell-Gwynne-ish girl with red hair. I must have looked blank for she said, smiling, "You don't remember me, do you, Rodney? But I was at B.I.P. with you. You don't remember *Molly Ellis*?" With the tact which sometimes infuriates my friends, I blurted out: "But you *can't* be Molly Ellis—she was a plain, mousey little thing!" The redhead laughed. "Yes, I know," she said. "Nevertheless, I was Molly Ellis." "You *were*? But—er—what's happened to you?"

The girl who had been my plain but pleasant little friend fluttered her beautifully mascara-ed eyelashes. "Well," she said, "when I left the B.I.P. I trotted round to all the agents but nobody wanted to give me a job. After some weeks I sat down

and took stock of myself and then I could see why: I looked as drab as a dish-cloth. So I decided to remodel myself on Nell Gwynne. I chose a completely different name, to suit my new personality, and here I am."

The name she had chosen was Diana Napier: she was at that time one of Korda's new young stars—and she married Richard Tauber. One has read countless stories and seen plays and movies about the transformation of a Plain Jane into a Glamour Girl—but Molly Ellis is the only girl I ever met who actually brought it off in real life.

My next assignment at Elstree was far more rewarding than the earlier ones: it introduced me to Alfred Hitchcock and it gave me my first chance to appear on the screen.

Hitchcock was directing Galsworthy's "The Skin Game" and, for what purpose I never discovered, I was bidden to be "on the floor" while he was at it. To begin with, I just stood in corners or sat around probably looking foolish and certainly feeling superfluous and mainly trying not to get in anybody's way. I had seen Hitchcock's "Blackmail" and "Murder" and had an awestruck admiration for him: though I was longing to engage him in deep conversations on "the art of the cinema" I was too tongue-tied in his presence to attempt an opening.

After three days of gaping uselessly at other people working I felt an urgent need to let somebody on the set know that I was a playwright and an actor and not, as I might well have seemed to be, one of the studio hands waiting for a chance to sweep the floor. Frank Lawton was juvenile lead in "The Skin Game" and I suddenly remembered that he had been offered the part of Madeleine Carroll's lover in "Dance With No Music." I approached him nervously and said, "I was very disappointed when you couldn't be in my play, Mr. Lawton." He looked me over casually, appeared unimpressed by what he saw, and said in the sort of voice one might use to a child one didn't want to be bothered with: "*You've* written a play?" "Yes," I said with pride. "I've had three put on in London." "Really? How nice!" said Mr. Lawton, disbelief written all over him: "Will you excuse me?" He wandered off.

That afternoon a friendly technician told me he had heard the following conversation between Mr. Lawton and one of the other players:

Mr. Lawton: "Who's that weird-looking boy with the long hair and the green shirt? I think he's not all there—he told me he'd had three plays put on in London. What's he doing hanging around here?"

The Other: "I don't know. I thought he was an actor—he told *me* he'd played 'Young Woodley.'"

Mr. Lawton, indignantly: "WHAT? Then he *must* be out of his mind!"

Mr. Lawton, it will be remembered, had first made his name as "Young Woodley."

My informant told me, in a fatherly way, that spinning yarns about myself would get me nowhere. "But it was all true, really it was!" I cried. And the good fellow appeared to believe me. "Well, then!" he said heartily, "Why do you hang about so miserable? Put on a bit of a front. And if I was you, son, I'd get meself a haircut and an ordinary shirt—they don't care much for the arty type round here."

I got myself a haircut and a dazzling white shirt like something out of the detergent advertisements and when next I presented myself on the set of "The Skin Game" Mr. Hitchcock, who had not, I believed, previously noticed me, said "Good Lord! What's happened to *you*? You look *like* a well-dressed extra!" He was shooting a small crowd scene at the time. "Come on," he said, taking me by the arm, "I can use you." He shoved me into place in the back row but one—and thus I made my first appearance before the movie camera. But only someone familiar with the shape of my forehead could possibly have recognized me.

Still, contact with the great man had been made—and in a surprisingly short time Mr. Hitchcock had become "Hitch" to me. I was enormously flattered when, during shooting, he would stroll over to *me* and discuss some point of technique, instead of waiting for me to approach him between takes—but he was so engrossed in making the film and in thinking up wicked practical jokes to play on the more vulnerable artists or on his main butt, a property man named Fred, that it was not until he started inviting me to join his party at lunch that I was able to talk to him about The Art of the Cinema. What Hitch had to say on the subject was hardly encouraging.

It had already struck me that the somewhat unstimulating policy of the British film high-ups was not so much one of getting

the best possible out of their script-writers and actors as of keeping them firmly in their places. I felt they were not using me to advantage, for instance (though that may have been my youthful uppishness talking), and it certainly seemed to me that Donald Calthrop, the actor, was unkindly treated: as the blackmailer in Hitchcock's first talking picture, "Blackmail," Donald had stolen the notices, so, presumably to stop him from getting above himself, for the rest of his contract he was given butlers and footmen to play.

I had not imagined that directors, too, suffered at the hands of the moguls but, according to Hitch, they probably suffered even more than the rest of us if they were creative artists. At the slightest sign of originality in approach or technique a director might well be regarded as a menace and any departure from the hoary formulae adhered to by the executive producers could be considered highly presumptuous—though I doubt whether some of those gentlemen were capable of using such a word. It is more likely that "Who does he think he is?" was the phrase employed to damn a director.

It always amazed (and, I confess, amused) me that among the moguls were some who, though British, had never properly mastered the English language. I actually heard one of them (since deceased) say to Fay Compton, who was playing a loose lady in a low dive in a film called "Cape Forlorn": "You'll 'ave to get your make-up changed, Miss Compton—you don't look enough like a habitat of the place."

The same gentleman once convulsed us all by approaching an extra, whose little chore it was to deliver a letter to the star, and shouting witheringly "Don't you know how to hand a letter? You bring it in on a silver saliva!"

It gave Hitch particular pleasure to furnish the moguls with Malapropisms. In earnest conversation with one of them, Hitch would deliberately misuse or invent a word—hoping, and rarely in vain, that the gentleman would repeat it in some pontifical pronouncement. I thought Hitch would burst with delight when, as we were viewing the rough-cut of a film with a far-fetched (not to say unbelievable) plot, one of the studio high-ups delivered the verdict: "The story of this pitcher's quite incredible!"

I asked Hitch how it was that he had ever managed to make a film so good, and so revolutionary in its use of sound, as "Black-

mail." He told me, with relish, that this was entirely due to a scheme he had evolved for tricking the executive producers.

The big shots couldn't stand the script of "Blackmail" as Hitch wanted to shoot it: the characters were too real, the treatment too original. It had to be re-written in accordance with accepted film conventions. Determined not to be thwarted, Hitch, when he started work on the floor, went right ahead, so he told me, and shot the most important scenes as originally written. Outside the entrance to the sound-stage he had someone keeping close "cave": at the approach of an executive producer, descending from his office to make sure that everything being shot was uninspired and conventional, this look-out man would dash in and give the director warning. Hitch would then be discovered directing the scene as re-written according to instructions.

Of course there was an uproar in the projection room when the rushes were shown next day—but economy was the current watch-word and, much as they hated these scenes, the powers-that-were could not bring themselves to spend more money on having them re-shot. Needless to say, Hitch could only work this trick at intervals and the finished film is consequently only partly what he intended it to be.

Picturegoers old enough may remember that the story opens with John Longden, as the detective hero, arresting a criminal and driving with him in a police van to Scotland Yard. It should have ended, according to Hitch's intention, with a precisely similar sequence—except that this time the criminal arrested and taken in a van to Scotland Yard was the detective's fiancée. Hitch was not allowed to finish on that dramatic note: instead, he had to show the girl, freed from suspicion, walking out of police headquarters scot free on the arm of her detective lover. Crime *was* allowed to pay in those days.

Hitch had a reputation for playing practical jokes and, though I was never a victim, I can vouch for it that he had a very individual sense of fun. When he was directing Ivor Novello in "The Lodger," he deliberately, in one scene, shot the star so that he appeared to be wearing on the top of his head a small flower-pot—which had been strategically placed on a shelf immediately behind him. I asked Hitch why he had done this and he said with a grin: "It was just too tempting—I couldn't resist it. Anyway, with that profile, why should Ivor mind having a flower-pot on his

head once in a while? "

When "The Skin Game" was finished Hitch told the big shots that, after his next scheduled picture, "Rich and Strange," he wanted me to work on a script with him: he wanted that script to be John van Druten's "London Wall," which the company had bought. I was so complimented and excited at this gesture of Hitch's that I told my mother I should not be able to sleep a wink until we started work on the project. Mother begged me not to "build on it" too much as otherwise, she said, I might find myself suffering *indefinitely* from insomnia. Mother, it seemed, knew the ways of the film world better than I did.

Hitch was as enthusiastic about making "London Wall" as I was about the idea of writing it with him: we made the fatal mistake of letting this be known. "London Wall" was assigned to Thomas Bentley, who wanted to make Jefferson Farjeon's "No. 17," and "No. 17" was given to Hitch.

"A Plot is Brewed . . ."

When the news was announced Hitch looked momentarily almost thin, so deflated was he with disappointment—and as for me, I felt cheated of the chance of a lifetime. "What we need is a White Lady," said Hitch and he bore me off to his flat in Earl's Court Road where his darling little wife, Alma Reville, the collaborator on nearly all his scripts, soothed and sympathized with us while Hitch mixed the cocktails. White Ladies were his speciality: they knocked one out more quickly and unfailingly than anything I have drunk since—even in America. After one of them, I was prepared to go on living and Hitch's natural ebullience was restored: after the second, he glittered into a smile. He had hit upon a new and fascinating plan for teasing the bosses. He would make "No. 17" as a burlesque of all the thrillers of which it was a pretty good sample—and do it so subtly that nobody at Elstree would realize the subject was being guyed. Not that Hitch had anything against "No. 17" as a thriller—but he didn't want to make a thriller: he wanted to make "London Wall."

Alma and I thought Hitch's idea simply splendid and we all had another White Lady on the strength of it. I do not remember anything further that happened that evening—but happily nobody forgot what we intended to do with the story that had been thrust

upon us.

The script was evolved between the three of us during a series of hilarious conferences at the Hitchcock home, the atmosphere of which was considerably more stimulating than that of the studio.

As the heroines of thrillers were invariably dumb, the leading lady of "No. 17," Hitch decided, must be literally dumb—must never utter from beginning to end of the picture. As the climax of a thriller was invariably a chase (generally between a car and a train at this period), "No. 17's" climax must be a chase-to-end-all-chases—its details so preposterous that excitement would give way to gales of laughter. It was on these lines and in this spirit that we conceived and wrote the script.

This time Hitch's little plot to get his own back on the producers misfired. It remained a private joke between the Hitchcocks and me. Elstree let the script be shot as we had written it, without a word of protest, and when the film was shown, accepting it at its face value; neither press nor public seemed to have an inkling that the director had made the picture with his tongue in his chubby cheek.

Hitchcock fans have sometimes remarked, after seeing "The Lady Vanishes" or one of his later thrillers for the second time, that they have noticed that some of the baffling incidents in the mystery remain baffling to the end: in fact, looking back and analysing the story in cold blood, one finds no explanation of them is even attempted.

I worried a little over the literal dumbness of "No. 17's" heroine. "Surely," I said to Hitch, "we'll have to explain *some-how why* she's dumb, or the audience won't stand for it." "They'll stand for anything," said Hitch, "as long as you don't give them time to think. I'll prove it to you. At the end of the picture we'll make her say 'I'm not really dumb—it was just a crook's trick!' You'll see—it'll get by."

There was no conceivable reason in the story why this character should pretend dumbness but, as Hitch had predicted, her explanation was never questioned and to this day, its satiric intention having been completely missed, "No. 17" is accepted as simply a minor Hitchcock—a slightly better than average thriller.

The Hitchcock household was a lively one—especially when Pat, the Hitchcock's little daughter, was around. She was then about five, a bouncing, saucy, irresistible child, unexpectedly witty.

I used sometimes to be taken into her nursery to say good-night to her after she had said her prayers. Hitch and Alma are Catholics and over Pat's bed hung a colour print showing the Assumption of the Virgin Mary—the Blessed Virgin floating heavenwards through the clouds. "Who is that a picture of?" Alma asked Pat as she tucked her in one night. "Tell Uncle Rodney who that lady is." There was no reply. Alma persisted: "Pat, what's the matter? Who is that lady? Tell Uncle Rodney who that lady is." "Amy Johnson!" said Pat.

It was usually after Pat had gone to bed that the thoughts of the conference turned to cocktails. Pandering as little to convention in real life as he did in his films, Hitchcock never batted an eyelid when Gladys, the maid, having brought in the White Lady ingredients and downed a couple herself, would join in the discussion—putting solemnly forward such outrageous suggestions for the film that soon all sensible ideas for the script evaporated in fits of laughter and uncontrollable giggles.

If people happened to drop in for a drink at this stage, Hitch could sometimes be persuaded to do his party piece, "The Whistling Sailor." He would go out of the room and come back stripped to the waist, his chest and corporation painted with lipstick and eyebrow pencil to represent an enormous fat face, its mouth pursed into an "O" as though whistling. Hitch then whistled, at the same time wobbling and shaking his stomach, and the big pink visage below his real face seemed not only to whistle but to change its expression.

Hitch and I sometimes talked about the future, looking forward to the time when we should have escaped from "Borstal" and Hitch would have achieved—as he was determined to do—the position of being able to choose his own subjects and make them in his own way without interference. He promised me that, when that day came, I would be among the writers he would engage.

Years went by. Hitch achieved Hollywood and an eminence beyond anything we had imagined, but he kept firmly to one team of script writers: Charles Bennett, the original author of "Blackmail" and, of course, Alma. I thought he must have forgotten his promise—but in 1946, when I was in New York, he cabled asking me if I would write the screen play for a picture ("Under Capricorn") which he was to make in England with Ingrid Bergman. As bad luck would have it, I was signed up to write and direct

"The Queen of Spades" and had reluctantly to turn the offer down.

Back in London, I was asked to a party at the Savoy to celebrate the completion of Hitch's film. Bergman and the other stars of the picture would be present—but what interested me most was that I should see Hitchcock again after a lapse of many years.

It was a colossal party, swarming with film personalities, and it was not possible at first to do more than exchange a few words of greeting with the host. He seemed little altered since the old days—except in weight: he'd been dieting, and though Hitch's features remained unchanged his "Whistling Sailor" would certainly be a different character, one with a leaner, hungrier look and far less Rabelaisian gusto.

When we sat down to dine, I found I had been placed beside Ingrid Bergman. On the screen she had always seemed to me a big, bouncy peasant type—but it often happens when one sees film stars in the flesh that they turn out to be a third of their screen size and Miss Bergman proved to be about the size of my sister Kay, who is very discreetly proportioned. In looks and manner, too, the star was so like the adventurous companion of my childhood that, after one or two champagne cocktails had loosened my tongue and drowned my usual shyness, I burst out with "Oh! Miss Bergman—I feel I've known you for years. You remind me so much of my sister." Miss Bergman laughed. "Oh dear! Do you think I have that effect on all people? Is that a good thing?" she asked.

Miss Bergman was everything that the publicity sheets would have one believe of the majority of film stars (though only the minority qualify): she was unaffected, intelligent, unconceited.

Before the Hitchcock party was over an opportunity came to talk to Hitch and I realized then that the "Whistling Sailor" was not all that had changed. He seemed to have developed different interests: his conversation was of finance, mergers between Hollywood film companies, problems of distribution, how much his last picture had taken, and so on. He had travelled a long way since we used to discuss "the Art of the Cinema" between "takes." He seemed to have become a business man as well as an artist. In the extraordinary world of the cinema, this appears to be necessary if one is to achieve success.

For an artist to be able to get what he wants on to the screen

without interference he must, if he starts as a writer, then become a director so that no other director will bring other ideas into his work (and other directors always have other ideas); but then he is still under orders from the producer and the executive producers who are generally businessmen or accountants, with minds like adding machines—so the writer-director must be tough enough to climb into the position of writer-director-producer, where he can dispense with and, if he feels like it, cock a snook at them all.

By the time he has achieved this happy eminence, however, he has often expended so much creative energy on the business side of films that his original clear vision as an artist has become blurred or, as had happened in some cases, altogether lost. It is as if a novelist or poet had to become head of a printing and publishing firm in order to get his work presented to the public in the way he would like it to be. It is difficult to imagine many eminent novelists or poets who would be capable of such a thing—but that is how it goes in what is only too rightly known as “the film industry”: to express what you want to express you have to be not only an artist but a shrewd businessman as well.

When the Hitchcock party broke up, “Auld Lang Syne” was sung. Somehow, I don’t know why, that tune seemed to make it clear that Hitch and I didn’t really know each other any more. We looked at each other. “Do you think we should clasp hands and join in this?” I asked. “No, I don’t think so,” said Hitch, “do you?” “No.” So we didn’t.

Still, this wasn’t “the end of a beautiful friendship.” In 1948 I saw the Hitchcocks again. Hitch was working on the script of Patrick Hamilton’s “Rope” and, fired with the idea of a “revolutionary” technique by which he would shoot the film without any cuts, in what would seem to be a single continuous camera movement, he strode excitedly up and down his sitting-room at the Savoy explaining it to me. It was the old Hitch again, caught up in the Art of the Cinema and striving to find new methods of expressing himself in it. The days of *Earl’s Court* and “*Borstal*” did not seem so very far away.

III

HOW TO BEGIN A FILM—AND HOW TO GET SACKED FROM A STUDIO

"Nor All Our Tears"

After "No. 17" I was given a novel which we might as well call "The Body on the Boil," with instructions to turn it into a script. Every office desk in the studio must have contained a screen play of "The Body on the Boil," for whenever the idea occurred to the Elstree authorities that one of their contract writers hadn't enough to do he was handed out a copy of this baffling work and told to script it. Whether the optimistic belief prevailed that someone, somehow, would some day succeed in translating the convolutions of the plot into screen-play form, or whether the intention was simply to keep the writer out of mischief, I don't know. There was a feeling around the studio that "The Body on the Boil" was used as an equivalent of oakum to be picked or a mail-bag to be sewn.

As with "The Black Hand Gang," nobody ever asked to see what I had written—but I did scramble together some sort of a script. If the producers had meant to keep me out of mischief, they failed. I had managed to write a three-act play at the same time.

My "Body" script having been popped away into some pigeon-hole, I was next assigned to work on a script with Alexander Esway—a pale, humorous little Hungarian who had arrived in England with a letter from Emil Jannings. He had come here, he said, because of an overmastering desire to work with British actors in British studios: he worked in Hollywood and on the Continent and hoped that B.I.P. would give him a few films to direct. As the letter from Jannings spoke in enthusiastic terms of Mr. Esway's skill and proficiency, he was signed up at once and when I was moved into an office with him, had already directed a picture called "Taxi for Two." By this time everyone in Elstree except the executive producers knew that the letter referred to Alexander

Esway's work as Jannings's chauffeur.

According to Victor Skutetsky, who laughs affectionately at the memory of Esway, the little man had presented himself at some German studios with a glowing reference from Lubitsch, for whom he had worked in Hollywood. The careful Germans checked up on him, and discovered the true nature of his employment. Philosophically Esway resigned himself to chauffeuring Jannings until, having accumulated a little money and collected an even more striking reference, he could attempt the invasion of Elstree and the bamboozling of the trusting British.

Victor confirms a story that Esway used to tell as the saddest of all stories in the history of the cinema. It appears that a German haulage contractor was persuaded to put up the money for a film to be made at one of the small German studios. To keep an eye on what went on, the contractor moved into an office at the studio and followed the shooting with the keenest interest. The *clou* of the film, the burning down of a house, was to be shot last—when all the rest of the film had been completed. When the great moment arrived, the house merely smouldered in a sullen sort of way. "This is no good," said the contractor. "There are cans and cans of old film in my office. Bring them and we will burn it and that will make a fine fire." Boys were dispatched to bring down the old celluloid and with this as fuel the house went up in a glorious blaze. Everybody agreed it was the best fire they had ever seen and made a splendidly dramatic sequence. All that was needed now was for it to be fitted into its proper place in the picture. Alas! the rest of the film could not be found. In their eagerness to satisfy the contractor's craving for a spectacular conflagration, the boys had thrown into the house every scrap of film they could lay their hands on—including all the earlier reels of the film they were shooting. "So the contractor retired from the film business and went back to hauling," Esway said. "It was very, very sad."

Neither Esway nor I had any ideas on how to treat the subject assigned to us: in fact we disliked it so much that at the very thought of it our brains became quite numb. So after lunch every day, Alex and I would put our feet up on our office desks and go to sleep. Sometimes, waking simultaneously with a start, we would detect an unmistakable something in the appearance of the office door—a something denoting that it had just been closed: footsteps trippingly receding down the passage and the faint echo of

a mocking laugh conveyed to us that the head of the script department had paid us an afternoon call.

One day Alex had an idea. He roused me with a yell. Swinging his feet down from the desk he rushed over and shook me. "Wake up! Wake up!"

"What's the matter?" I asked drowsily.

"I know vot to do!"

"What about?"

"About the film—I know how ve open it!"

"Good. How?"

"Ve vill open it vith a bank blowing up!"

"Why?"

"No special reason." He was deflating fast. "But I think a bank blowing up vould make a good opening for a film. Don't *you* think it vould make a good opening for a film?"

"No."

"Oh . . . I thought it vould make a good opening for a film."

We went to sleep again.

After the termination of his Elstree contract, Alex went to France to pursue there, in a more intelligent and less inhibiting school, the career of director which he had created for himself. Before he died, soon after the war, he had turned out some highly acclaimed pictures, shown here in London at the Academy and Studio One. They included the Raimu film, "*Monsieur le Souris*." One cannot but admire the ex-chauffeur's enterprise and confidence: he felt he had talent and was determined to prove it. And he did.

The last time I saw Alex was in Paris. It was somewhere near the Folies Bergère, and he was celebrating his birthday by standing champagne all round to Miss Bluebell's Showgirls, (including my sister Kay), a bevy of British beauties who gave him knowing and faintly sceptical looks when he assured them that he loved all the English. To me he sounded perfectly sincere—but showgirls tend to be a disillusioned lot. I could well believe he loved the English. I could even believe he loved the gentlemen at Elstree: they had, after all, given Alex his first real chance—and that is one thing that can be chalked up in their favour.

The play I wrote while working on "*The Body on the Boil*" was "*Strange Orchestra*." It was eventually tried out at the Embassy Theatre, Swiss Cottage. On the first night two potentates

from Elstree were present. The play was well received and the reviews in the morning papers were nearly all good. I turned up at the studio determined not to look smug and rehearsing in my mind a disarmingly modest reaction to the comments (surely they'd be kindly, if not downright complimentary?) which my bosses in the script department would probably make. "Oh, thank you. It really went over far better than I had expected," I would say—and "Of course I was lucky to have such a good cast." Something like that.

I chatted to one or two people at the studio, had a cup of coffee in the canteen and eventually made my way to my office. On my desk was a note. It was the sack. Knocked off my perch, frantic with anxiety and trying to convince myself that there *must* be some mistake, I rushed with my troubles to Hitch.

"I can't understand it—I simply can't understand it," I said wildly. "It's not as if I'd written a flop—I'm absolutely mystified."

Hitch solved the mystery. Earlier that morning he had heard a passing reference to "Strange Orchestra" from the potentates who had been to see it. Their dialogue had gone something like this :

"What had we better do about Ackland ? "

"After the play last night ? "

"Yes."

"Well, I don't think we want writers on the staff turning out high-brow junk like that."

The studio doors had opened to me because of another piece of high-brow junk at the Arts Theatre : that they should close behind me because of what was obviously far more of a " box-office " play—as it later proved to be—was rather bewildering. But close they did.

I must say, I felt a certain amount of elation—one always does, in youth, at the completion of an episode in one's life : that a particular phase has ended only means that another will begin and one optimistically assumes that it will be a more exciting phase. How comforting is the adage : " When one door shuts, another opens." It may even be true—but I can only say that, in my case, the other door was unconscionably slow in opening. I was finished with Elstree but there were plenty more studios and I felt confident one of them would be glad to employ me after my eighteen months' experience. In a buoyant, business-like way, I wrote to a number

of the British studios, offering them my services. I did not dream that it would be three years before I saw the inside of a studio again.

I was living at home, at the time, with my mother and my two sisters, Kay and Betty, and though it was, of course, disconcerting to have lost my weekly pay packet of £8 10s., they were comfortably sure that we could "manage" for a little while and that soon I should be drawing an even more impressive salary.

Kay was working as one of the eight Frascati girls at Frascati's restaurant. Betty was making lampshades. Mother had gone to two lectures on stocking-salesmanship and was about to embark on a new career as a stocking saleswoman, going not exactly from door to door, but to the doors of people we knew in the theatre who could afford half a dozen pairs at a time. If I did not immediately receive an offer from some film studio, I could, I reflected, go back to acting while I waited for an opportunity to take the next step in my climb towards becoming a film director. And then, of course, there was always the play which had caused my expulsion from Elstree: surely, after its successful try-out at the Embassy, somebody would want to put it on in the West End.

Weeks went by—and nothing came of my letters to the various film companies. The family fortunes were much reduced when Mother, in a moment of exasperation on her stocking round, muttered to herself, "Blast the bloody stockings!" and promptly—a judgment, it would seem—slipped on a banana skin and broke her arm. It was absolutely imperative that I should earn some money: I should have to return to acting.

It was so much more easily said than done. All I managed to find in the theatre were odd jobs like carrying a spear in the Arts Theatre production of "The Ugly Duchess." This was such a come-down after my last appearance as the provincial "Young Woodley" that I felt like the luckless hero of one of those backstage film dramas in which a Broadway star, within five hundred feet of celluloid, is demoted (either because of drink or jealousy or both) from having his name in lights to selling matches in the gutter.

During this first period of exile from the studios, my principal job—whether I was in or out of work—was hawking "Strange Orchestra" round the offices of agents, managers and producers. At last, eighteen months after the Embassy try-out, it was presented

at the St. Martin's Theatre. John Gielgud produced it—and it was acclaimed as a “play of the year.”

Interviewed by a Sunday columnist, I could not resist telling him of my Elstree experiences: I was delighted to find his article headed “Sacked for writing a Success.” “What are the British film studios up to?” my interviewer demanded. “What indeed?” thought I.

I realized, naturally, that since I had published the story of my sacking, it was highly unlikely that Elstree would want me back, but with a West End hit running and myself the subject of those “White Hope of the English Theatre” type of articles which at that time greeted (and, in honesty it must be confessed, gratified) new and youthful dramatists, I was persuaded that one of the other companies to which I had written would take an interest in me. None did.

There was a glorious moment when it seemed the American film industry might put the British film industry to shame (or anyway, score off it) by giving me in Hollywood the chances denied me here: a lady from Hollywood, representing Metro-Goldwyn, invited me to drinks with her at Brown's Hotel. After enquiring whether I would be prepared to go to the American film capital in a few weeks, she said she was afraid they would not be able to pay me more than seventy-five pounds a week to start with. I quickly assured her that, for the privilege of working for so distinguished a company in the cause of film art, I would be prepared to try to get along on that sum. The lady said “Swell!” and shook my hand warmly. I never heard another word from her.

Despite the success of “Strange Orchestra,” I began to mope. Had my first love, the cinema, rejected and forgotten me altogether? No, not quite, it appeared. I was to be subjected to the teasing and tantalizing treatment of which Elizabethan poets were always accusing their “coy mistresses.”

Returning home one evening, I was given a message which threw me into a great state of excited anticipation. Mr. Mycroft had telephoned from Elstree and would like me to ring him at the studio. It was too late to do so that day: I spent a restless night debating with myself the manner in which I should receive the proposition he obviously meant to make me. I believe I decided to be magnanimous, to make it clear I would let bygones be bygones, and to tell Mr. Mycroft frankly that I would be only too

delighted to set foot in a film studio again.

After three telephone calls next morning (naturally I rang too early—probably while Mr. Mycroft was still at his breakfast), I was eventually put through to him. Mr. Mycroft was as affable as he had been at our first meeting. He wanted, he said, to tell me that a script of mine, a screen play of Eden Philpott's "Yellow Sands," had been found in a drawer and was considered so good that it was now to be filmed.

"Yes?" I said, breathlessly expectant.

"Well," said Mr. Mycroft, "I just thought you'd be interested."

I said hastily that of course I was. There was a slight pause and then I asked humbly if there was any further work to be done on the script—could I be of any help on the film? The answer was no—he had simply felt I would be glad to know that it was to be made: shooting was to start almost immediately in Cornwall, and Robert Newton was to be one of the stars.

"Well, thank you very much for telling me," I said in a glum voice.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said Mr. Mycroft kindly—and he rang off. I was desperately disappointed.

"Now I don't see there's any need to be so upset, darling," my mother tried to console me. "It was very nice of that Mr. Pycraft to telephone. You know now that you wrote a good script: it's going to be made into a film with a good cast—you always liked Robert Newton—and people will see it and the ones who matter will realize that if it's any good it will be entirely due to you. I think you should be pleased, darling. It will probably lead to offers from other companies. You weren't very happy at Elstree, now were you?"

I cheered up: Mother was surely right. I *should* be pleased—I had been, to some extent, vindicated. I decided I would take a little holiday in Cornwall: my play was doing so well that I could afford to do this. I telephoned Bob Newton, found out where the film was to be shot, booked myself a room in the neighbourhood and, vowing inwardly that I would be most discreet, took myself off to enjoy a few days by the sea. For once I *was* discreet—I discussed the film with nobody but Bob.

There have been many stories about Robert Newton's rudeness and wild behaviour, but I have never known him to be rude except to somebody who had "asked for it" and if he behaved

erratically he had his own reasons for doing so. He is an actor of great integrity; he is impatient with people who do not know their jobs and has a profound contempt for everything that is bogus or pompous. At the time of "Yellow Sands" he was as gay as a bee. He is a Cornishman and to be in Cornwall put him in excellent spirits and strengthened his Cornishman's almost mystical belief in a rugged individualism.

Typical of Bob's methods of flouting petty authority was the donkey incident. To the consternation of the film people, Bob turned up one day accompanied by a small, demure-looking donkey which, on his way to the studio, he had bought off a tinker: he insisted on keeping it in his dressing-room. This, he was told, could simply not be done—and he was sharply reprimanded for unseemly frivolity. He registered bland surprise. "Why all this fuss?" he asked mildly. "What is one more ass among so many?"

Down on that Cornish beach, Bob Newton and I swapped stories of our experiences in the film industry and resolved that we would never let it induce us to lower our artistic standards. For years after, whenever we met and the talk turned to films, Bob would roll a dark, dramatic eye and say, in a conspiratorial voice, "Cornwall! Remember Cornwall!" It was a secret sign between us that we were still believers in the ideal of integrity preserved.

Back in London, refreshed, I felt I could now put up a becoming show of patience while I waited for film offers to roll in. Meantime, I would write another play: I had an idea for one. Before I had had time to get started on this, I was commissioned to do a dramatization of Lady Eleanor Smith's "Ballerina." As the family finances were depressingly low (my mother was contemplating a refresher course in stocking-selling) I was delighted to take this job—which came to me (as the TV commercials say) through the courtesy of Emlyn Williams. He had been asked to make the dramatization but had declined because he had so much else to do at the time; knowing that I was hard up, he had suggested me for the work and had urged Lady Eleanor to approach me without delay—implying that I was very much in demand.

I was so little in demand that I would willingly have carried another spear had the opportunity offered—and I was deeply

grateful to Emlyn. I did not know him very well and up to then had scarcely credited the stories I had heard of his fabulous kindness: here was proof that they were true. Emlyn is indeed extraordinarily kind to people he likes: this does not save them from his wicked wit.

Emlyn is famous in the theatre for his devastating remarks. "Have you heard Emlyn's latest?" theatre people ask one another, as in other years they used to ask: "Have you heard what Mrs. Pat (or Dame Lilian) said last night?"

Leonora Corbett, once described as the wittiest woman in the world, told me she had acquired this reputation by quoting Emlyn's most devastating cracks: certainly we all shamelessly dined out on stories of his acid comments. My own favourite concerns a young actress who was suspected of matrimonial designs upon Noël Coward. Her method of ingratiating herself with "The Master" was to agree with positively everything he said. Mr. Coward apparently found so much acquiescence a bore: anyway the friendship cooled and the young actress was seen, sad-eyed and alone, at all the smart restaurants. "Poor, foolish girl!" said Emlyn, eyeing her witheringly and using his special, scathing voice. "She nodded the orange blossoms *right* off her head."

In writing my dramatization of "Ballerina" I had become fascinated by the character of the heroine's sadistic hunchback son: it was the best written part and I longed to play it. I still believed that if I made an impression as an actor, this would help me towards my objective—the film director's canvas-backed throne. While the play was being cast, I sat about hunched up and wearing what I hoped was a horribly sinister expression: it must have been, too, for people began doing a "double take" when they looked at me and asking each other, "What on earth is the matter with Rodney?" At last I heard the whisper I had been waiting for: "Doesn't he look dreadful? Just like the ballerina's sadistic son!" I got the part.

The play opened at the Gaiety—and, to my delight, I scored a success as the hunchback. I preened myself as I waited for the film companies' reactions: I dreamed a happy dream of the day when I should be billed as writer, producer, director and star of some phenomenal film and hailed by the critics as the most sensational acting (and, of course, directing, producing and

writing) discovery of the age.

The film companies remained aloof—blind, obtuse. They were apparently as oblivious of the arrival of “a brilliant young actor” on the West End stage as they had been of the advent of “The English Tchekov” (the first, had I known it, of a long line, for now scarcely a year goes by without some critic bestowing that title upon some playwright).

I concealed my chagrin as best I could. I did not suspect that there were two people in the “Ballerina” company who, though *they* had not stolen the notices, were destined to become film stars, while I was not.

Leo Genn’s performance as a surly juggler did not in the least suggest that he would have a dazzling future as an actor: I doubt whether anybody could have shone in the part which, I may as well admit, had not very much interested me in the writing. The character was very poorly sketched-in and certainly gave Leo no chance at all to display the warmth, charm and velvet voice with which he later besnared the film fans.

I suffered no pangs of jealousy over Leo: he was just “old Leo” to me. I had known him since I was thirteen—when we had both stayed at my Aunt Rhoda’s boarding-house off the Finchley Road. Leo was rather a studious boy and after our evening meal he would go up to his bedroom, which was next to mine, to do his “prep.” This led to Aunt Rhoda’s sending *me* upstairs to do *my* “prep.”—a chore I abhorred. In revenge and the hope of annoying Leo, I used to lean out of my bedroom window and throw my boots in at his. Leo is so even-tempered I couldn’t provoke him to anything worse than a cheerful prophecy that if I went on fooling about like that I would end up with a broken neck.

The girl in the company who was to achieve film stardom was a dancer, Brigitte Hartwig—a most beautiful, ethereal creature whom Anton Dolin had discovered and brought over from the Continent. Perhaps she was lonely in a strange land, perhaps the Svengali-like influence that Dolin appeared to exercise over her was not a happy one: I remember her standing, often, in the wings with tears coursing down her cheeks. She was so lovely and so gentle that I used to think of her as Hans Andersen’s “Little Mermaid.”

Some time after “Ballerina” Brigitte Hartwig went to Holly-

wood and, as Vera Zorina, became a star. With the change of name her personality changed: when I next saw her there was nothing about her to suggest "The Little Mermaid." Her acting seemed to be hard and brittle: she was still exquisite to look at and her technique as a dancer was perfect—but her pathos and her strange, enchanted quality had (for me, at least) completely gone.

The run of "Ballerina" ended and the now familiar hiatus followed. My indomitable mother had abandoned stocking salesmanship and was busily and successfully engaged in inducing people to buy a dainty little line in combs-with-tassels-on which she herself thought "the most idiotic things she'd ever come across."

Betty had won a literary competition for "The most appetizing description of a breakfast," and Kay was taking a troupe of girls—billed as "Six Rodney Girls Six"—round the Continent and was, we gathered from her sporadic picture postcards, happy and in funds.

As my "triumph" in "Ballerina" had resulted in only one offer—to play Hitler in a Sunday night production—which I turned down on the grounds that it would make me feel physically sick, I decided I had better settle down again to playwriting. I wrote "Birthday."

Basil Dean took an option on the play. Though this was encouraging, I knew that months might go by before anything more came of it. I was surprised and thrilled when he announced it would be put on as soon as possible: almost immediately it went into rehearsal at the Cambridge Theatre with a cast that included Jessica Tandy, Brian Aherne, Marie Lohr, Jean Cadell, Muriel Aked, Margaretta Scott and my dear Leonora Corbett.

Muriel Aked, who had a comedy role, was not able to rehearse for the first ten days: the part was read by her understudy, an odd, amiable woman with a formidable chin and a mad shock of hair. The moment she spoke her first line in the play, we all burst out laughing—there was something fantastically, irresistibly comical about her delivery. "Who is she? Where does she come from?" we asked. I cannot remember where she came from but I do remember that she was Margaret Rutherford—perhaps the best-loved British film-star comedienne to-day. I was not alone in thinking it a pity that she should be understudying—but I don't believe any of us at the time imagined that she would so soon reach her present unique position.

Halfway through rehearsals, Basil Dean invited me to lunch to discuss a proposition. He had, he said, long been toying with the idea of a film of "Gulliver's Travels" and had intended asking Noël Coward to write the script: now, convinced by this new play of mine that I had "a more satirical mind than Noël Coward," he would like me, as soon as the first night was over, to start work on the script. The salary he suggested was impressive. I dug out my childhood's copy of Swift's book, re-read it with a new interest, and looked forward blissfully to the first night of "Birthday."

The first night came—and bliss was banished. Despite the excellent cast the play was a horrible flop. The curtain rang down on the second and final week and I was left penniless, except for fifty pounds which Leonora lent me on condition that it was not to be repaid until I had written another hit.

I sat gloomily at home, waiting for instructions from Mr. Dean as to when I should start work on the film. No instructions came.

Three months passed. Leonora's fifty pounds had long ago vanished and I was going the round of the theatrical agents, trying to get any sort of work. It was a most disconcerting business for, as I had established myself as a playwright, agents would have me shown in ahead of the other out-of-work actors, in the belief that I had come to ask assistance in casting a new play. Their faces would fall and their attitude change when they discovered I had not come to provide jobs for their clients but to ask for one myself. It was very like going into an antique shop and revealing that one had come not to buy but to sell.

After a time I found myself back in repertory, playing juvenile leads at the New Brighton Pavilion—where I received full publicity as "Famous London Playwright" and had copies of my plays on sale (though nobody bought them) in the foyer of the theatre.

My only connection with the cinema now was as a filmgoer, getting in "on my card" at local cinemas on afternoons when we had no matinee. Not that I went much: films at this comparatively early period of talkies seemed to me so abject, so dull, vulgar and static that while the rest of the audience were weeping at the tribulations of Al Jolson, I would be shedding tears of regret for the beautiful, magical, lost art of the silent screen.

Brooding on the deterioration of the cinema, I had almost succeeded in persuading myself that I was cured of my old infatuation with this medium. With a quite uncanny sense of timing, the

studio door promptly opened to me again : in I rushed, rejoicing—my infatuation as strong as ever. I did not mind that I was received back not as a writer and potential director but as an actor : the great thing was that I was back.

It seemed I owed my first chance to appear in a film to "Ballerina." On the strength of my performance as the hunchback, I was offered the part of a half-wit in a film at Beaconsfield studios. Based on a play by James Dale, it was called "The Case of Gabriel Perry." The director was Albert de Courville. I suddenly remembered my thirteenth birthday and how I had rejected a de Courville show at the Palladium in favour of a D. W. Griffith film at the Scala : had I not decided then that when I became a film actor I would work for Griffith? Fate must have been laughing over her loom in a rather malicious way, with an "Oh-no-you-won't, my boy!" overtone, as I reached that presumptuous decision : anyway she had so arranged matters that it was the producer of the spurned spectacle, "Rockets," who was to direct me when I appeared before the cinema camera, while the director of the preferred film, "Orphans of the Storm," was for ever denied that felicitous experience.

Mr. de Courville seemed quite indifferent to the honour that had been done him—but then, one couldn't help noting, he seemed indifferent to almost everything. Recalling the exuberant bounce and glitter of the Lorna and Toots Pounds shows, I had expected their producer to be an ebullient, vital person. Mr. de Courville, in the film studio at any rate, was not in the least like that. He was a quiet, pale, melancholy-looking man and, to my surprise, most of the time he simply sat, silent, in the directorial chair that bore his name on the back—leaving the players to perform and the cameraman to shoot with little interference.

This was a method of directing so different from Hitchcock's that I was amazed. As an actor, I was disconcerted : accustomed to stage producers, who supervise every move and discuss every vocal inflection and facial expression, I had hoped, particularly as this was my first film part, to be given considerable guidance by the director—but this was not Mr. de Courville's method. He allowed me to work out my own interpretation.

The half-wit I was playing was a shop-assistant who, while sweeping the shop, found a body and was promptly accused of murder : the wretched youth, torn from the arms of his mother (I

wept bucketfuls—it became a very damp scene for Martita Hunt), was thrown into prison. In transit from one prison to another the boy escaped and was last seen lying on the railway tracks—not like Pearl White, bound hand and foot and confident of rescue, but seeking grisly death of his own volition. It was an unhappy part and I was not very happy in it as I had no way of knowing whether or not I was giving a satisfactory performance. I longed to see the “rushes” of each day’s shooting but was too shy to ask if I might : Mr. de Courville, who, of course, did see them, made no comment on my work so I assumed that he was pleased.

I had to wait to be the judge of my own performance until I caught up with “The Case of Gabriel Perry” at the Coronet, Notting Hill Gate—oddly enough, the very theatre at which my mother had made her last stage appearance, strutting it valiantly as Dick Whittington.

The film had started and as I came in I was confronted with an agonized close-up of myself in floods of tears—an over-drawn picture of misery.

The other members of the audience, judging from the comments of my neighbours, were less critically inclined than I : my day was made when over my shoulder came a whiff of eucalyptus drops and the heartening words, “Don’t he cry natural !”

IV

HOW TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE AND LOSE FRIENDS

"The Storm . . . and After"

Though I had become a film actor I seemed to be as far from my objective, the director's chair, as ever: I would have to hit upon some other line of attack.

After much serious thought it occurred to me that perhaps one should force oneself to become a businessman and find the backing to produce a film written and directed by oneself. I would, I decided, prove that it wasn't money that mattered but Intelligence and Understanding of the Film Medium. For a few thousand pounds—if I could only raise as much—I would make a picture that would be as great a Milestone in the Art of the Cinema as "The Birth of a Nation" or "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari."

In Hugh Walpole's "The Old Ladies" I thought I had found the perfect subject. It seemed to me intensely cinematic: it offered tremendous scope for warning shadows, huge close-ups of hands and feet and faces, and the use of ever such significant angles and symbolic objects. With all this and the added attraction of an insane leading character, it could not fail to make the director's reputation.

Aglow with enthusiasm, and, as a result of my twenty-five pounds a day engagement as a half-wit, temporarily in funds, I sat down and wrote—without having acquired any rights in Walpole's novel—a detailed shooting script of "The Old Ladies."

Surfeited with "All Talking, All Singing, All Dancing" movies, I burnt with ambition to revive the lost Art of the Screen: I wrote the script with only one line, or to be exact, one word of dialogue. This came at the climax of the story when Miss Berringer, the terrified spinster, was literally frightened out of her life by her crazy old gipsy neighbour: shuddering and shrinking back in her bed, in the light of a dying candle—placed on the floor, to throw

big, artistic shadows—Miss Berringer cried “Jesus!” and fell dead. I was enormously impressed with my script and hoped Hugh Walpole would be, too. I sent it to him, asking if he would give me the film rights of his novel for a year.

Mr. Walpole invited me to tea. Instead of being bowled over by my artistry in cutting every line of his dialogue and substituting close-ups of dripping taps, hand plucking at bedclothes and feet creaking downstairs, he was eminently practical in his avuncular, liberal-minded-clergyman way and suggested I was putting the cart before the horse. We could both of us, he pointed out, make a great deal more money if I wrote a play of “The Old Ladies”: if a dramatization of his novel had a West End run, the film rights would then fetch a far larger sum. This was obviously common sense. As I had no play of my own clamouring to be written, I readily fell in with his suggestion.

It was not until I arrived home that evening that I remembered there was very little left of my earnings as a half-wit: though I was eager to write the play, I would have to find some more immediately remunerative work on which to live meantime. Mother was about to embark on a new career as saleswoman of some minor monstrosities called “Dolliwogs,” when I landed the part of juvenile in a play by Kim Peacock, “Battle Royal.” Rehearsals took up much of my time and also, as they gave me a distinct suspicion that I might be all very well as a sadistic hunchback but not as a juvenile, they depressed me, so several weeks elapsed without my tackling the job of reconceiving “The Old Ladies” in terms of dialogue. It was a task, I felt, that demanded peace and a quiet mind—and I kept putting it off.

One night at the Embassy Theatre, where “Battle Royal” was playing, Emlyn Williams and his wife, Molly, came to my dressing-room after the show. They asked me first to supper at the Cafe Royal and then to stay for the week-end at their riverside bungalow at Wraysbury. I went to stay for the week-end—and I stayed for the rest of the summer.

It was a delightful time. We were all in our middle twenties and often used to sit on the river bank, melancholy in the twilight, brooding over and consoling each other for our vanished youth. Perhaps we heard, in those still evenings, Time’s winged chariot hurrying near. We became very active: I started on the play of “The Old Ladies” and Emlyn wrote “Night Must Fall.”

In the intervals between intensive spells of work, we chattered like magpies. Molly Williams, as Molly O'Shann, had once sung and danced the leading role in "Nicolette" at the Shaftesbury Theatre and, amongst many other theatrical appearances, had been in the chorus of "Battling Butler" in which Jack Buchanan had played the lead, so we were all "pros" together. But more important in the cementing of a friendship between the three of us was a shared passion for the silent screen and particularly for the films of D. W. Griffith. We had been brought up on cinema—though, of course, Emlyn had had a scholarship to Oxford, too—and had the most vivid recollections of Griffith's masterpieces.

Molly and I would try to outwit each other in recalling scenes and shots which had bowled us over in our cinema-frequenting early youth. "Do you remember when Lilian Gish heard her sister's voice singing outside the window in 'Orphans of the Storm'?" "Do you remember that terrifying close-up of Lilian's frozen face, with icicles on her eyelashes, when she was lost in the blizzard in 'Way Down East'?" "Do you remember the close-up of Mae Marsh's hands in the trial scene of 'Intolerance'?"

Molly recalled that she had almost attacked her beloved mother for thinking "Scaramouche" a better film than "Orphans of the Storm" and Emlyn produced a tattered old exercise book containing the opening chapters of his first work—a novel called (as far as I remember) "The Tombs of Babylon," written at the age of eleven as a result of his seeing "Intolerance."

We were all very happy in our reminiscences—yet it was our enthusiasm and nostalgia for David Griffith's work that led, within a few months, to our parting in umbrage. For over a year the Williamses and I were not on speaking terms.

When we returned from Wraysbury to London, I still saw a great deal of Emlyn and Molly. They had taken a house in Lincoln Street, Chelsea, and I was living in a South Kensington mews when "The Old Ladies" was presented at the New Theatre the following year, during King George's and Queen Mary's jubilee. Hugh Walpole had predicted that after the play's West End run we should be able to sell the film rights for a substantial sum and I was hoping he was a reliable prophet. Then something happened that drove all such mercenary thoughts clean out of my head: I read that David Wark Griffith was coming to London to re-make "Broken Blossoms" as a talking film.

Discovering that he would be staying, in a few days' time, at the Dorchester, I wrote to him there. I said: "Whatever I know about technique and construction I have learned from you and Tchekov. I would consider it such an honour and privilege to work for you that, if I can help in any way in writing the new version of 'Broken Blossoms,' I will do it for nothing. I would so much like you to see and recognize—as I am sure you will—the influence of your work on my writing, particularly in the technique of sustaining suspense, that I have arranged for a box to be kept for you any night you can manage to go to the New Theatre."

Mr. Griffith duly arrived in London but he did not reply to my letter: perhaps it had been overlooked or gone astray. After a week or so I telephoned the Dorchester and asked for Mr. Griffith: I was put through to his suite and, to my shocked surprise, was greeted with a hoarse, aggressive, American growl demanding who I was and what I wanted. It belonged to Griffith's manager, Mr. Greathouse—"Mr. Griffith's gangster," as he came to be known at Twickenham studios where the film was to be shot.

Mr. Greathouse said he knew nothing about my letter or the box at the New Theatre: after considerable growling on his part and pleading on mine, he grudgingly agreed to see me at the Dorchester Hotel.

When I arrived to keep the appointment, I found a typical, glowering little film executive who treated me with great suspicion and had apparently decided that if I met Mr. Griffith it would only be over his dead body. He didn't say much, but I did—rattling on with nervous volubility about Griffith's wonderful work and how much it had taught me and how greatly I revered him. He stopped me in the middle of a sentence: "Pardon me a moment," he said and disappeared upwards in the lift. A few moments later he reappeared, accompanied by a tall regal figure whose Roman nose was unmistakably that of *the master*. Said Mr. Greathouse to Mr. Griffith, who was looking gloriously vague, "I want you to meet a guy who knows more about your pictures than you do yourself—Mr. Ronald Atkins."

I have met quite a number of eminent film directors: some I admired, some I despised as phoneys, and for one or two (like Hitchcock) I felt, but in a minor degree, the same sort of admiration, amounting to hero-worship, that I felt for Griffith. I cannot imagine I would ever have dreamed of attributing nobility to any

one of them—but “nobility” is the word for the aura which surrounded David Griffith, in spite of his predilection for extraordinary clothes.

Rather than describe him myself, I will quote someone who knew him more intimately than I ever did—another idol of my youth who, like Griffith himself, had been dropped by Hollywood like a red-hot brick when the terrible truth dawned on the businessmen-producers that he was an artist and a poet. Eric von Stroheim in his obituary broadcast on Griffith in 1948 said :

“I’ve met thousands and thousands of people in my life but I have yet to meet an equal to D. W. His enemies, and there were many, called him ‘Hook-nose Dave.’ Tall, always slender, even with the advancing years, with those sharply-hewn features, the aquiline nose, the nearly-bald pate, the over-prominent lower lip, and wrapped in a white toga he could have magnificently impersonated a Roman senator. Paradoxically this finely-constructed, sensitive, aesthetic man, who has given the world the first film poetry, this sculptor of everlasting and outstanding screen characters had a deplorable penchant for loud, check, almost county suits and overcoats, and ever so broadly striped silk shirts, and floppy panama hats of gigantic size. But had he had overalls on, he would have attracted everyone’s attention because he had what we call ‘allure.’ His walk was of a majestic cadence.”

It was this magnificent person who stood before me in the lobby of the Dorchester and who majestically drifted towards a couch, sat down and, with every sign of affability and willingness to talk, beckoned me to sit beside him. Mr. Greathouse must have realized that once we got going we would continue for hours : he sauntered off—I have no doubt to the bar. Mr. Griffith and I started talking.

The beginning of our conversation was rather maddening for me : while I kept on trying to describe Griffith’s own films to him and keep the discussion on Film Art, the Master persisted in raving about “The Thin Man,” a picture directed by his protégé W. S. van Dyke. He had recently seen this film and so had I—and to me it was just a common detective film with far too much dialogue.

What so attracted Griffith to “The Thin Man,” he told me, was that it showed, for the first time in the cinema, a true and completely unsentimental picture of the relationship between a not-so-young married couple who were devoted to each other.

He was, of course, right—and the exchanges between them were

admirably written and delivered. But I had been so seething with irritation at this film, all talk-talk-talk-and-no-montage (the Art of the Cinema thrown away) yet acclaimed even by Miss Caroline Lejeune, that I hadn't particularly noticed what Myrna Loy and William Powell were saying to each other. Anyway, whatever they said belonged not to the Cinema but to the Stage—the enemy of cinematic art.

In the course of our talk, I suggested to Mr. Griffith that I should work as script-writer on his re-make of "Broken Blossoms": he seemed most willing to consider this proposition. As the conversation went on, a staggering idea came to me: why should I not play the Richard Barthelmess part of the Chinaman? After all, I definitely looked rather Chinese and had, indeed, played at Miss Fogerty's the role of a Chinese cook who caused the collapse of two British spinsters by serving up curried rats.

As soon as this idea had crystallized, I started trying to look inscrutable, narrowing my eyes and glancing sideways with them. At this juncture Mr. Greathouse returned and, apparently assuming from my expression that I was suffering from something—possibly starvation—suggested we should go up to the suite and have a snack and a drink. Mr. Griffith thought this an admirable suggestion and up we all went.

While we were waiting for the snack—cold chicken and champagne—to be sent in, I continued to look as Oriental as I could and introduced into the conversation as many references as possible to my performance as the half-wit in "The Case of Gabriel Perry" and my success as the strange, "rather *Chinese*, really," young man in "Ballerina."

This resulted in Griffith's going into a general dissertation on acting and then telling me that the greatest piece of acting he had seen in the contemporary London theatre was Emlyn Williams' performance as the page-boy with a penchant for cutting off ladies' heads in "Night Must Fall."

"Oh, my God!" I thought. "He *can't* be going to conceive the idea of having Emlyn for the Chinaman! Anybody less Chinese-looking than Emlyn it would be impossible to imagine!"

To head Mr. Griffith off, in case his mind was turning that way, I said hastily that Emlyn was, as Mr. Griffith had seen for himself in "Night Must Fall," a brilliant playwright: furthermore, his admiration for Mr. Griffith's work equalled my own. What about

letting Emlyn and myself collaborate on the script of "Broken Blossoms"? Mr. Griffith thought that a splendid idea—but he was not to be deflected from his disquisition on Emlyn's acting.

He became more and more eulogistic about him and particularly about his voice, his beautiful Welsh voice. I suddenly realized that I had missed the significance of the name David Griffith. I listened gloomily as he continued to enthuse—and, sure enough, the idea, fatal to my newborn ambition, popped into the director's mind. Looking positively inspired, he slapped the table and cried "I'm going to have that boy play the Chinaman!"

I didn't say, in so many words, that I couldn't see why a Chinaman should have a beautiful Welsh voice but, made bold by cold chicken and champagne, I gave a lecture on The Art of D. W. Griffith: I enlarged on his mastery of communicating ideas and emotions with the use of words and quoted, from Eric Elliot's "The Anatomy of Motion Picture Art," the passage (as far as I could remember it), "Every scene in 'Broken Blossoms' emerges mysteriously and inevitably on the screen as though brought into being by the scene which has preceded it." If Griffith could achieve this again, I said, with sound in counterpoint as envisaged by Pudofkin in his famous pronunciamento on the correct use of the sound track, there would be little need for dialogue or beautiful Welsh voices.

"No!" roared Mr. Griffith in his beautiful Welsh-American voice from the deep South. "I want to hear words, words, words!" He, too, was now well away on cold chicken and champagne. "I want words to come from the screen, beautiful words, like Shakespeare, like the Bible, so that moving pictures will *mean* something at last!"

"But Mr. Griffith!" I said frantically. "You've already made moving pictures mean a great deal without words, words, words!"

Griffith, however, was no longer interested in images arriving mysteriously and inevitably from those that had preceded them. Words he wanted and words he was going to have.

I had forgotten that D. W. G.—as he was known in his great days—had been an actor and an unsuccessful playwright: it was only in desperation, when his play "A Fool and a Girl" had closed after two weeks, in 1908, that he entered the world of the Bioscope, and he did so with such a feeling of shame that for the first year or two he worked under the name of Lawrence Braying-

ton, hoping that his friends in the legitimate theatre would never know how low he had fallen. So all the great pioneer director's discoveries in how to use moving pictures as a medium of artistic expression had arisen from sheer frustration—disappointed dramatist that he was—at having to say what he wanted to say without words.

While I was still contemplating this ironical revelation, Mr. Griffith told Mr. Greathouse to call up Emlyn Williams' agent first thing in the morning. I came out of my reverie. Relinquishing with regret the idea of my becoming the all-talking Richard Barthelmess, I brought the conversation back to script-writing—and left the Dorchester at 3 a.m. with Griffith's consoling assurance that he and Emlyn and I should write the screen play together.

A day or two later Mr. Greathouse telephoned me and asked the name of my agent. As my last one had parted from me with a delightfully encouraging letter in which she said that after a great deal of trouble she had persuaded a London manager *not* to put on one of my plays, I had been trying to dispense with the services of a go-between altogether. Mr. Greathouse suggested that the agent who was handling Emlyn's contract might handle mine as well and so get the whole thing, as he said with unconscious aptness, "tied up." I agreed that this would be a good idea—and the agent agreed to handle my part of the contract.

Emlyn would not be free to start work on the script for a week or two and meanwhile I plunged ahead with the "treatment"—without, as yet, going into the matter of how much I should be paid. (Having got as far as this, I had abandoned the idea that the honour and privilege of working for D. W. G. would be reward enough.)

There were daily conferences at the Dorchester—and several nightly ones too. One of these finished up at Quaglino's with Griffith, champagne-stimulated, giving the band-leader two five-pound notes to play "Frankie and Johnnie" which he then sang from beginning to end, *con espressione*, in what Rene Clair has described as his rich, deep, "clergyman's voice."

By this time, though I could still never bring myself to call him anything but "Mr. Griffith," we had, in the words my sister Kay used to enter in her schoolgirl's diary to record the beginning of a friendship, "become chums." Mr. Griffith had never, somehow, got around to that box at the New Theatre but I had presented

him with a copy of "Famous Plays of 1934-1935" in which "The Old Ladies" was included. With his unfailing instinct for the magnificent (fifty thousand extras in "Intolerance," not to mention an unfulfilled project for a film contrasting the lives of Christ and Napoleon and lasting six hours) Griffith, after glancing at the book, which I doubt if he ever read, invariably introduced me as "Rodney Ackland, one of whose plays is included in 'The Six Greatest Plays in the World.'"

In the 'twenties, Griffith had been bitterly criticized for the way in which he tried to "preach," to force some "sentimentally idealistic" moral out of every film he made. "Broken Blossoms" had been a parable of non-violence opposed to brute force. I was more than astonished to learn from Mr. Griffith that the theme of the new version of the film was to be the imperative necessity for Anglo-American friendship.

I could not understand this at all. Anglo-Chinese friendship, yes—there would be no difficulty in introducing an argument in favour of that. But how the story of the love of a young Chinese for an English child and her death at the hands of a Cockney bruiser, her father, was to express the Anglo-American friendship theme, I could not remotely imagine.

One morning Mr. Griffith presented me with an astonishing scene he had just written. Set in an East End pub, it concerned an American journalist, an English sailor, a prostitute and a poet. They all talked at enormous length, the poet got slightly high and made several long Griffithian speeches about the Brotherhood of Man—and none of it had anything whatever to do with the story of "Broken Blossoms."

Mr. Griffith had just finished this odd piece of writing when I came into his sitting-room. He looked pale and as if he was suffering from a hangover: I wonder now whether the local colour for the scene had not been gathered the previous night—perhaps the very night of Rene Clair's extraordinary encounter with D. W. G. in a dockside pub, described in the French director's recent book, "Reflections on the Cinema."

Clair had gone down to the East End. It was foggy—and all somehow indescribably familiar. Sitting in a pub, he tried to track to its source this strange "I have been here before" feeling. Suddenly it came to him: "Broken Blossoms." Wherever he had looked in the romantically fog-shrouded streets, shots from the old

masterpiece had met his eye. His mind was full of D. W. Griffith, he was wondering what had happened to the ageing pioneer of Film Art. Rene Clair glanced around the pub—and there, as though materialized by his thoughts, was Mr. Griffith, standing solitary at the bar, ordering a double Scotch.

Fearing he must have gone out of his mind, Clair approached the lonely figure and asked, “*Is it D. W. Griffith?*” The figure admitted that it was. Clair, delighted, asked the American to join him. Mr. Griffith magnificently did so—and treated him, and everybody within earshot, to a ringing discourse, *not* on the Art of the Cinema but on that of Shakespeare. He spoke eloquently, quoted several Shakespearian speeches and, with the splendid vagueness that by this time I knew so well, wandered off into the Limehouse night.

I never did find out how or where I was to incorporate Mr. Griffith’s new and to me irrelevant scene in my “treatment” because the conversation in which I was tactfully working around to this difficult point was interrupted by a telephone call from the foyer of the hotel. It was Mr. Greathouse calling. “There’s a dame down here,” he announced to Mr. Griffith. “She’s just got in from Paris, she’s lost her money, she says she wants to see you and she’s crying. She looks like a mixture of Garbo and Gish—only prettier. I guess you’d better have her see you.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Griffith, “I guess I had.”

I thought it perfectly charming of him—though, unless he was prepared to help the girl financially out of his own pocket, the interview was likely to be a complete waste of time as “Broken Blossoms” had already been cast. Both Julius Hagen, the backer, and Mr. Griffith had felt that Dolly Haas would be right for the Lilian Gish part: she had been signed up for that role and was in London waiting impatiently to play it. There was no other feminine role of any consequence that Mr. Griffith could offer the newcomer—though, of course, if he insisted on his pub sequence he might let her play the prostitute.

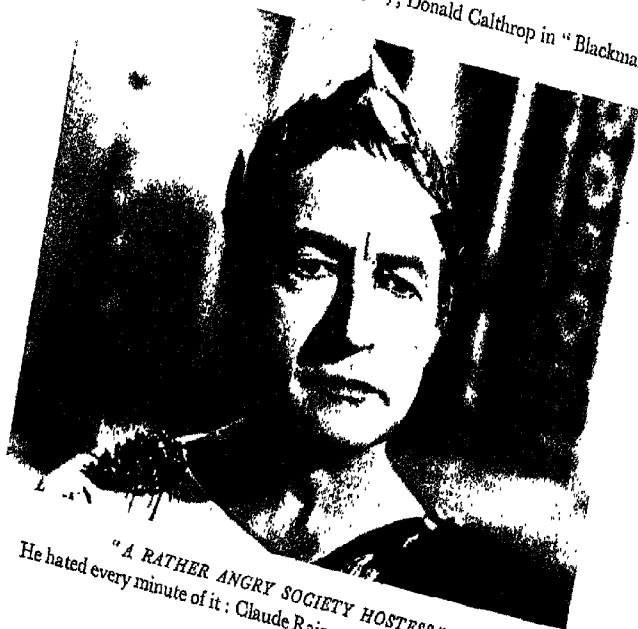
Mr. Greathouse brought in the girl. She was ravishingly beautiful. Her name was Ariane Borg. All her life (I suppose she was about eighteen) her ambition had been to become a great film actress—another Garbo or Gish. She had been working in a laundry in Paris and had managed, out of her meagre earnings, to save up a little money. On her way to London to see the great Mr.



"A FLOWERPOT ON IVOR'S HEAD"
Alfred Hitchcock has a wicked sense of humour



STEALING THE NOTICES
After this they gave him butlers to play; Donald Calthrop in "Blackmail"



"A RATHER ANGRY SOCIETY HOSTESS"
He hated every minute of it: Claude Rains as Caesar in "Caesar and Cleopatra"

Griffith she had lost the money: she stood before us penniless.

As she told her sad story, big, beautiful, round, photogenic tears, like pearls, rolled down her lovely pale cheeks: she looked infinitely pathetic. Mr. Griffith gazed at her as if bewitched. Then he said simply, "I must have her for the Gish part."

I could smell a storm brewing so I took my leave and went off to pay a long postponed visit to my—and Emlyn's—agent. I had not previously discussed our contracts with him but hoped he had "tied things up" satisfactorily. I was furious to find that the proposal was that Emlyn was to be paid twice as much as I was for working on the script.

My long remonstrations only brought the reply that Julius Hagen, in budgeting for the film, had set aside a certain sum for the script and he was not prepared to revise his budget.

I went to see Mr. Hagen. It was, he agreed, an inequitable arrangement that I should receive so much less than Emlyn but he could not afford to pay more for the script. Why, he asked, did I not go to Emlyn and suggest it would be only fair if we went fifty-fifty on the amount payable for the script? As Emlyn was to be paid separately and substantially for playing the Chinaman in the film, no doubt he would be willing to take less for collaborating on the script, so that I, who had done the preliminary work, could take more.

It seemed to me too awful to have to argue with friends over money—nothing could be more embarrassing. I told Mr. Hagen this. He seemed to think me unnecessarily squeamish—the discussion of money matters with no matter whom was to him the most natural thing in the world. He volunteered to speak to Emlyn for me.

A couple of days later he informed me that he had done so: it was now up to me to follow the matter up. I telephoned Emlyn's home. Molly answered—and her manner when she learned who was ringing was markedly frigid. She didn't know, she said, whether Emlyn would speak to me but she would call him. I wondered what on earth Mr. Hagen could have said to him: clearly it had been the wrong thing. Emlyn came to the telephone and, in a beautiful Welsh voice of ice, said he had been told I was livid: so, he might add, was he. Why had I not discussed the contract with him if I felt I had a grievance? I tried to explain but it was no use. Phrases like "going behind my back" fell into my

appalled ear: finally Emlyn slammed down the receiver with a noise like a thunder-clap. The silence that followed lasted between us for more than a year.

Bitterly distressed over this row, I went along to the Dorchester hoping to be able to tell Mr. Griffith of my grievance. The moment was not propitious—in fact the afternoon was altogether disastrous: the storm that I had sensed brewing in the offing burst.

After his first interview with Ariane Borg, Mr. Griffith had engaged a room and a chaperone for her and for a week had coached and rehearsed her in the final scene of "Broken Blossoms": he was now to spring his "discovery" on Julius Hagen.

Mr. Hagen was seated in the suite when I arrived: I had no chance to tell him, as I longed to do, that he had succeeded in breaking up my friendship with Emlyn. Mr. Griffith, obviously keyed up, waved me to a chair—Miss Borg was produced from another room and she and Mr. Griffith played the chosen scene. At the end of it Mr. Griffith turned to Mr. Hagen with a triumphant "Well?"

"We'll have to have her," said Mr. Hagen.

There was a knock on the door and in walked Dolly Haas.

This was my cue for what is technically known as a quick fade.

The upshot of that afternoon was that Mr. Griffith did not do the re-make of "Broken Blossoms" and I did not write the script.

My dream of working with the Master destroyed, I went dismally home and brooded for days. Pulling myself together at last, I went to the Dorchester to see Mr. Griffith. I was told he had gone back to America. He had, however, left something for me: I was handed a large envelope. Inside was the original programme of "Orphans of the Storm" with scrawled across it the cryptic words, "For Rodney Ackland—but not good-bye. D. W. Griffith." I stared at it, touched but gloomy. "Orphans of the Storm." I certainly felt like one, for the studio door at St. Margaret's, Twickenham, was closed against me for the second time, Mr. Griffith had removed himself from my life—and I was out in the cold, alone.

V

BANK HOLIDAY AND THE PINEWOOD PARTY

"Fate's Plaything"

Though I had lost my chance to work with D. W. Griffith, I consoled myself a little with the thought that, any day now, I would probably be able to do something about filming "The Old Ladies"—but the play finished its run without a hint from any of the film companies that they were even aware of its existence. I had once more to resign myself to postponing indefinitely the Milestone of Screen Art that I was still determined one day to direct. That Hugh Walpole and I could ever have imagined film producers falling over each other to get the rights of a story about three female septuagenarians can only be explained by optimism on my part and unfamiliarity with film producers on his. There was nothing for it now, it seemed, but to write another play—with filmic rather than cinematic possibilities.

I began one, but my savings from "The Old Ladies" royalties gave out before I had reached the end of the first act. In desperation, I went to Sydney Carroll, then a theatrical manager as well as writer of a series of weekly articles in the *Daily Telegraph*. On the strength of one of these articles, in which he had acclaimed "Birthday" as a masterpiece—rather belatedly, as it had already come off—I gave him a brief outline of the new play and suggested that he paid me so much a week while writing it, in return for a managerial option on the completed work. He agreed to let me have ten pounds a week—and off I went to the Isle of Wight, full of gratitude and the desire to turn out a play that would please him.

Apart from the writing of the play, all that I remember of this period is the seething excitement among the natives of the island and the summer holiday-makers caused by a rumour, of unimaginable origin, that Mae West was coming to stay at the local yacht

club. For several weeks any blonde lady with a billowy bosom was liable to be asked for her autograph—but eventually the fever died down and as far as I know Mae West's visit to the Isle of Wight was just another version of "Russian soldiers with snow on their boots."

Returning to London with the completed play—a bomb ready to be dropped on the London theatre—I handed it in triumph to Mr. Carroll. He read it and, to my grief and horror, expressed the deepest disappointment: in as kindly a way as possible he made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, to have any further financial interest in "After October"—as I called the piece—would only be throwing good money after bad.

A dank period followed. With the rise of the Academy Cinema and one or two others which specialized in showing "unusual" films, I became something of a film fan again. I noticed an odd phenomenon about the contemporary audiences. In the silent days, as far as I could recall, people did not invariably talk throughout the most dramatic scenes, but now, it seemed to me, the more talk that came from the screen, the more came from the audiences.

In my reduced between-plays circumstances, a visit to the cinema meant reducing my evening meal to coffee and a cream doughnut at a teashop (the cheapest way, I found, of making oneself not only full but rather sick and disinclined for food): as I had sacrificed what my mother would call a "proper" dinner in order to see a film, I resented more than normally my enjoyment being spoiled by the voluble idiots who always seemed to occupy the seats behind mine. After several ruined evenings, I began to devise methods of shutting them up.

The most efficacious was to turn and say to them politely, "Would you mind talking a little louder as I can't quite hear *all* your conversation—the dialogue in the film sometimes drowns it."

On one occasion I was with a friend, watching an enchanting Austrian film of Schnitzler's "*Liebelein*"; the heroine had just been told of her lover's death in a duel—the scene was movingly acted and tears were about to pour down my face when, from the seats behind, came, in loud, upper-class accents: "Did you remember to tell Fortnum's to send Aunt Florence that pie?" "Oh, my dear! I completely forgot about it!" A discussion followed. At last, unable to bear any more, I turned to them and tried the "would you mind speaking a little louder" trick which had

generally brought about an abashed hush. This time it failed. The couple appeared to be brother and sister whose account at Fortnum's had rendered them impervious to shame. There was a brief, stupefied pause, followed by a hurried duologue in only slightly lowered tones: "*What* did you say?" "Oh, my dear, don't take any notice." "Was he trying to be funny?" "Perfectly frightful!" After this had gone on for several minutes, my exasperated companion turned, glared at them and quite uncompromisingly yelled, "For God's sake, shut up!" The pause that followed this outburst was deep and prolonged—then: "*Jews*, I suppose!" said the man in tones of ineffable contempt. As the heroine of "*Liebelei*" prepared to fling herself down from a top-floor window, the affronted couple continued their discussion of the sad case of Aunt Florence and the Fortnum's pie.

A year or more after Mr. Griffith had shaken the dust of London from his toga and stalked majestically back to Hollywood with Ariane Borg under his wing, I saw advertised the talking version of "*Broken Blossoms*"—directed by Dolly Haas's husband, John Brahm, and starring Dolly Haas, of course, and Emlyn Williams. Impelled by curiosity and, perhaps, a sneaking hope that it would get the bird, I took myself to see it. I was prepared to strain my ears for comments and, for once, not to rebuke those two all-talking members of the audience who, as sure as Fate was weaving at her loom, would be sitting behind me.

This sound-hampered version of the old Limehouse fable of Love and Death seemed most peculiar and unconvincing—its wings clipped, or rather bitten off, by dialogue: matters were not helped by the regrettable facts that Dolly Haas had a Cockney-German accent and Emlyn bore less resemblance to a Chinaman than D. W. Griffith himself could have done.

When "*Broken Blossoms*" commenced the two seats behind me were empty. I had not long to wait, though, before the inevitable chatty couple arrived. They didn't speak up loud and clear in upper-class accents: they at least paid the screen the compliment of giving it their attention—if only to make muttered comments on the action and the actors, followed by damped-down explosions of laughter. I longed to hear what they were saying but could not distinguish the words.

Then came the moment when Dolly Haas, as the ill-treated waif, raised her eyes to the Chinaman who bent over her tenderly.

A close-up of Emlyn and Dolly filled the screen. With tears trembling on her lashes and a smile quivering on her lips, Dolly stretched up her arms to Emlyn : she was about to speak. From behind me came a piercing stage whisper : " Kiss me, sergeant ! " This passionate command was so wildly inappropriate to the situation on the screen, it struck me as terribly funny. Convulsed with laughter, I turned to see what sort of person had issued it. I found myself face to face with Emlyn and Molly Williams. We were all in such uncontrollable giggles that we had to leave the cinema—and the long silence between us was ended. We confessed that we had missed each other sadly and agreed that it was a pretty conceit of Fate's to bring us together again in laughter at the very film over which we had parted in anger.

A day or two later Molly telephoned and asked me to a party they were giving. I accepted the invitation though I was feeling too depressed to look forward to it : I had still not managed to sell " After October " and was flat broke. On the appointed night I went to Emlyn's house but I didn't go in. Through the windows I could see the crowd of stars milling about within : they looked so gay, prosperous and confident, I simply couldn't face them. I stood watching for a little while in the rain—wondering why the situation was so strangely familiar. Who was I ? Emil Jannings in " The Way of All Flesh," perhaps ? No—he had stood in the snow. A policeman came up, raindrops glistening on his cape, and paused beside me—and the little scene was complete : I was Belle Bennett playing the self-sacrificing mother in " Stella Dallas." Slightly cheered at having identified myself, I went home to my own self-sacrificing mother.

It was she who was able to tide us over our most impoverished moment. I had told Emlyn that Mother was planning to take up salesmanship again but was temporarily stumped for something to sell. He was at the time filming in " The Dictator " with Madeleine Carroll and Clive Brook—and he managed to get her work as a revolutionary lady in a crowd scene, at three guineas a day for twelve days.

When the film was eventually screened, Betty, Kay and I, who couldn't imagine Mother as a raving revolutionary, rushed to see it. The crowd scene came—and there, slap in front of the camera, was our darling parent wearing a mob-cap, shaking her fist and yelling ferociously for, as far as we could gather, Clive Brook's

head. We burst into hoots of laughter and cries of "Oh! Isn't Mummie a scream?"—and not even the outraged protests of the people in front could silence us. We had become the horrible people in the seats behind.

At last I succeeded in selling "After October." It was put on at the Arts Theatre and I was again "discovered" as "the English Tchekov." Sydney Carroll behaved with typical generosity: he wrote a special article about the play, as a result of which, and the other notices, "After October" was transferred to the Criterion where it ran for a year.

The film companies, apparently deaf as adders and blind as bats, took positively no notice. I might have waited years for a chance to work on a film script had it not been for Sydney Carroll. He intended to go into a film production partnership and I was commissioned by him and Arnold Pressburger to write an original story, "Bank Holiday," in collaboration with Hans Wilhelm, a lively-brained young screenwriter from Germany with loads of charm and a sense of humour unusual in his country of origin.

The subject was one that appealed to us enormously. We conceived the film as a mixture of comedy and tragedy. We thought of Bank Holiday as a great day full of minor, human incident: there would be a young couple tremulously bent upon spending an illicit night alone together at the seaside and having, because there's not a room to be had, to spend it with countless other trippers on the beach—and, of course, there would be harassed parents vainly trying to control their unruly and adventurous young (Mum shouting frantically to Dad, "Arthur! Arthur! Quick! Marina's gone down the men's convenience!"). And, because death does not take a Bank Holiday, elsewhere there would be a wife desperately ill in hospital, a husband contemplating suicide. The bustle of railway stations, the clamour of crowds, laughter, ill-temper, good humour, tears: we would make our story as realistic as could be.

We were very pleased with our completed script. Messrs. Carroll and Pressburger, however, were not. They had had in mind a gay film: they had thought of Bank Holiday as a day fraught with nothing but fun. We tried to convince them that anybody who had actually experienced Bank Holiday at, say, Brighton, would readily admit that the day was only too fraught with so much else—discomfort, family squabbles, frustration, food prob-

lems, tired feet, for instance. All the more reason, argued Mr. Pressburger, not to remind the cinema-going public of the depressing fact: give them a film livelier than life, something strictly non-realistic—that was the thing to do. The very thought of suggesting that people die on Bank Holiday as on every other day in the year struck Mr. Pressburger as downright cruel. No, he was certainly not at all pleased with our script.

Hans and I felt wretched. We had been given such a wonderful chance, we thought, and we had worked like beavers—and now nothing was to come of it all. But, as a matter of fact, something did eventually come of it: about two years after we had written the script, Gainsborough Pictures bought it for Carol Reed to direct. Margaret Lockwood and Hugh Williams were cast as the young lovers, and Kathleen Harrison and Wally Patch as the Cockney parents of roving brats: it sounded so promising that Hans and I couldn't resist the temptation to rush off to the studios. When we arrived on the set, it was made quite obvious to us that we were not wanted, though Mr. Reed (he had not yet been knighted) couldn't have been nicer and had his photograph taken with me on the set while Hans was in the gents.

It was a great relief to us to run into Frank Launder, just as we were beating an ignominious retreat from the studios. He was head of the Script Department there, in those days—and we were delighted when he complimented us on our script. He introduced us to Ted Black, the producer, who also said he liked the script. I was greatly pleased that, though originally condemned as being too realistic to be good entertainment, it had appealed to him—for Ted Black and his brother, George Black, enjoyed the reputation of being two of the shrewdest businessmen in the industry. I must have blurted out some remark to that effect, intending it as a compliment. Ted Black looked at me solemnly. Hans stood by nervously, clearly feeling Mr. Black might resent my reference to himself and his brother. Apparently he didn't. He merely said in a cool voice: "Of course, I'm the *fey* one." The adjective was so unexpected that we all gaped at him until he gave us a friendly wink and walked off—whereupon we burst into shouts of laughter.

We made one or two subsequent, tentative sallies upon the studios but they resulted in little more than a meeting with Margaret Lockwood, whom I found earnest, simple and charming. She gave, you may remember, a wonderfully true performance in

"Bank Holiday." She looked and seemed completely natural: she had a real sincerity and no false eyelashes. She had not, at that time, been glamorized—and I have often thought it a pity that she ever was, since glamour successfully hid much of her genuine talent. "Maggie" Lockwood is a far more considerable actress than many of the critics have realized.

At Gainsborough, Maggie gave much thought to her career. She told me one day: "A part I'm simply longing to play is Tess of the d'Ubervilles."

"Really?" I said, in surprise. "But I don't think that idea would be very popular with any of the studios, do you?"

"Well, I can't see why not," said Maggie, firmly. "It's been made twice before, once with Mary Pickford and once with Janet Gaynor, and both times it was a *terrific* success."

The casting of either as Tess of the d'Ubervilles seemed to me distinctly odd. I made inquiries and was amused to find that Maggie had made a slight mistake. The film in which, at various times, the Misses Pickford and Gaynor had starred was "Tess of the Storm Country"—the screen version of a good old stock-company standby, all sugar and sentimentality. According to one critic, the title role "gave Our Mary a golden opportunity to be sweet, wholesome and optimistic." That Tess must have been a very different girl from Hardy's heroine, as I pointed out to Maggie—who, after looking momentarily embarrassed, laughed and said, "Oh, well! I never was a literary girl, was I?"

Nobody at the studios could understand why Hans and I flapped about, worrying over the progress of our brain-child: the reason in my own case was that I still had dreams of becoming a director and I couldn't imagine a film I would be better able to direct than "Bank Holiday." Hans, more modest in his immediate ambitions, simply accompanied me to the studios, I believe, to see that I did not tread on too many people's toes. It was he who eventually put his own foot down and said we must not pester the people at Gainsborough: Carol Reed was an excellent, intelligent man and surely we could trust him to do right by our script.

Carol could indeed be trusted. He made a success of "Bank Holiday"—and in subsequent newspaper interviews, even some of the more recent, he was reported as saying, "Yes, 'Bank Holiday' was my first real success—but I had a wonderful script by Rodney Ackland and Hans Wilhelm to work on." Such a hand-

some acknowledgment from a director is as rare as it is gratifying. Every screenwriter pines for recognition of the importance of his contribution to a film: very few receive it. In fact, as Hans and I discovered, the wretched writer is often completely ignored.

At the time when "Bank Holiday" was finally ready for the screen, we were both in Paris, making a brief study of the French cinema. We had been told that the Brothers Ostrer (who, of course, *were* Gainsborough) did not intend to give "Bank Holiday" a West End showing: less "fey" than Ted Black, they had little confidence in the film. By chance, one of the West End cinemas found it needed a film at short notice. The Ostrers let them have "Bank Holiday." This meant that, though the film was simply put on to fill a gap, it would be reviewed by the critics. Hans and I were delighted when this news was telephoned to us in Paris.

After the press show we bought, for the rest of the week, all the London papers we could find. At the week-end we bought all the "Sundays." It was quite obvious that the critics had enjoyed "Bank Holiday": the reviews were most excitingly favourable. The acting was praised, the direction was praised, everybody who'd had anything to do with the production was praised—except Hans and myself. We were not mentioned anywhere: the fact that we had conceived the whole thing was nowhere commented upon. We were still the film's forgotten men.

It is not only among the Press that the screenwriter is treated with something less than respect, as my mother learned to her embarrassment.

Following "Bank Holiday," I wrote with Wolfgang Wilhelm (Hans's brother) the script for "The Silent Battle"—a re-make of a French film originally called "The Chinese Fish." When the film had been completed, "Wolf" and I—who had found the adaptation quite tricky—were glad to see that our names were given some prominence in the credit titles. I mentioned this to my mother, who must have made a mental note of it.

She was staying at Slough when "The Silent Battle" broke out at a local cinema. She told her friends proudly, "Rodney and Wolf Wilhelm wrote that film," and took a small party to see it—making sure they arrived in time for the credit titles. A number of names appeared on the screen—but not Wolf's and mine. My mother asked the cinema manager why the names of the writers

had been left out of the credit titles. "The *writers*?" he said, looking puzzled. "Oh, yes. Well, nobody's really interested in *them*, so when we have to cut a film down a bit for time, their credit's the first to go."

"The Silent Battle," in which Valerie Hobson and John Loder starred, was made at Pinewood. Though I was still to wait some years before I was allowed to direct a film, at least the studio doors were again open to me.

Pinewood Studios in those days seethed with stars and excitement and to stay at the Pinewood Club, as I did while I was working there, was quite an experience. Of that, more later.

Tony Havelock-Allen, Valerie's then husband, was producing "The Silent Battle": he was stimulating to work with and his sense of humour enlivened the script conferences, making them something to look forward to instead of (as they usually are for the screenwriter) something to dread. At one of them, a fussy gentleman was slapping the script with a petulant hand and saying, "Just look at these sequences! In every one of them somebody's using the telephone!" "Well, why not?" said Tony. "We can always change the title to 'L'après-midi d'un 'phone'!"

Valerie Hobson, though she invariably looks elegant and rather *grande dame*, has a great sense of fun, too, and when I spent weekends with them would join in the ridiculous parlour games we invented with immense gusto. She had been a student, like myself, at the Central School and had been much impressed by "Foge" from whom, she said, she had learned that hard work and stern self-criticism are essential if an actress is to succeed in her career. Valerie was certainly hard-working and surprisingly self-critical. In "The Silent Battle" there was one sequence in which, as a secret agent, she had to hurl a bomb from a train at the Dictator of (something like) Ruriboolia. Watching the rushes of this scene the actress said: "Oh, dear! Don't I rather look as if I'm throwing a bun to an elephant instead of a bomb at a Dictator?"

"Bathed in Glory"

Alterations to the script of "The Silent Battle" were decided upon when the film was already on the floor and as the scenes to be revised were always urgently needed—by the next morning, in fact—I had to put in a good deal of night work in my bedroom at

the club.

One night when I was typing away frantically, there was a knock at my door. Without leaving my typewriter I called out, "What is it?" A voice replied: "Will you stop typing, please—Miss Garson can't sleep with that racket going on."

"Who's Miss Garson?" I asked.

"I dunno—new here. Playing opposite Mr. Donat, I think, or something. Says she's got an early call and can't sleep with that racket going on."

"Well," I said crossly, "will you give her Rodney Ackland's compliments and tell her *he's* got an early call, too, and has a script to finish." This sounded a bit pompous, so I added: "It won't take more than another twenty minutes or so—I hope."

"O.K." said the voice.

Next morning as I was leaving my room with a bundle of papers under my arm, the door next to mine opened and a good-looking girl with red hair came out and gave me a gracious smile. "Oh, Mr. Ackland," she said, "I'm Greer Garson. I'm so sorry I disturbed you when you were writing last night. It must be maddening for a writer to be interrupted—I mean, the train of thought broken . . . ? Naturally, I wouldn't have complained if I'd known it was *you*. I do hope I'm forgiven?" She smiled again, appealingly, beseechingly.

Unaccustomed to so much honey before breakfast, I was quite overcome. I suddenly realized that Miss Garson must have overheard my conversation with "the voice" the night before. "I'm afraid I must have sounded very rude," I said, in some confusion. "I just *had* to finish this . . . er . . . thing . . . I must have seemed very inconsiderate . . . but, you see . . . er . . ."

"Not at all! I understand perfectly—I do, indeed!" said Miss Garson: and adding cordially, "I'm so glad we've met!" she withdrew into her room, leaving me to trundle down the passage, a little mystified by her (as it seemed to me) somewhat excessive courtesies. Was Miss Garson merely an exceedingly sweet girl? It occurred to me over breakfast that perhaps Miss Garson was, in addition, an exceedingly *tactful* girl. Newly arrived in films from the stage, she had probably heard that I was a playwright and, uncertain of a future on the screen and believing she might have to return to the theatre, she may have felt, like any sensible girl, that it would be wise to cultivate the good-will of as many

playwrights as possible. I hope Miss Garson's fans will not think I am being unfair to her. Even they will admit she has since shown every sign of being a sensible girl: at any rate she has known how to climb to the very top of the Hollywood tree and stay there.

Sometimes in the evening, when shooting was over for the day on "The Silent Battle" and "Goodbye, Mr. Chips" sets, Greer Garson would stroll over to the club with John Loder and me for a chat and a drink. There was a studio rumour of a romance between Greer and John Loder but my own impression was that Miss Garson, at the moment, was far more interested in making a success in films than in making a conquest.

Robert Donat did not patronize the club—he preferred to put all his energy into concentrating on the exacting role of Mr. Chips. "He's wonderful," said Greer, who was, of course, playing Mrs. Chips. "It does seem a pity they have to make an old man of him." It did, rather. I had seen Robert Donat on the stage in "Precious Bane" quite some time previously and had said to everybody within earshot, "God! What a find for the screen!" He had then the strong romantic quality that Richard Burton has to-day.

Greer Garson didn't think Mrs. Chips was much of a part. It had been small enough to begin with, she said—and complained bitterly that it had been further reduced as filming went on: it really gave her no chance to show what she could do. How oddly mistaken an actress can be! "Goodbye, Mr. Chips" introduced Miss Garson to the American public—and a year later there she was in Hollywood, starring in "Pride and Prejudice" with Laurence Olivier. The American public doted on her. Just how doting and numerous her fans were I did not realize until 1946, when I visited New York.

My adaptation of "Crime and Punishment" was to be presented there, with John Gielgud as Raskolnikov. John and I were staying in the same block of apartments, 1 Fifth Avenue: it was quite luxurious but the service seemed to us a little off-hand. During rehearsals, John threw a party in his apartment for a crowd of theatre and film people. Among them was Greer Garson, wearing a remarkable dress like a lampshade, radiating glamour and gracious condescension as befits a film star at the zenith.

A couple of days after the party, John said to me: "Have you noticed how the service here has improved? Everybody has sud-

denly become terribly solicitous. I wonder why? "

"I was wondering, too," I said. "Nothing seems to be too much trouble now. Perhaps somebody has discovered that in London you're not altogether unknown and I'm getting some of your reflected glory." I continued under this misapprehension until one of the maids approached me shyly one day and asked, "That really *was* Greer Garson at Mr. Gielgud's party, wasn't it? " "Why yes, of course it was! " I said. "Gee! Isn't she just wonderful? And you really *know* her—I mean really to talk to? " drooled the girl. "I've known Greer Garson ever since she made her first film," I said coldly. "Oh, gee! Isn't that just too wonderful? " cried the maddening creature, gazing at me with the sort of reverent adoration generally reserved for holy relics. It was quite evident that the attention currently lavished on John and myself had nothing to do with *his* glory or its reflection on me: we were both bathed in glory reflected from another source—a sort of lingering afterglow from Miss Garson's lampshade. No need for Miss Garson to ingratiate herself with a playwright now! She had probably forgotten all about that little incident at the Pine-wood Club—but it gave me a certain malicious satisfaction to recall it.

The club was not reserved for established film people—anybody could belong to it. The slightly pathetic result was that the place was often cluttered with optimistic would-be film-actors, drinking tea or cocktails and hoping, as desperately and vainly as Kay and I had done when we were children, to be "discovered." It would be impossible to compute the number of teacups dropped to the floor by pretty girls in an effort to attract the attention of the late Leslie Howard. Time and again, as the mild-eyed Leslie passed by, some young person would let fall her cup, almost at his feet, and squeal with horror at her clumsiness. Leslie, stuffing his pipe—lighted as often as not—into his pocket, would politely help to pick up the pieces, acknowledge the babbled apologies with a smile, and drift away, leaving behind the impression that he had neither noticed what the girl looked like nor heard a word she had said. It must have been most upsetting for the poor girl—though I'm perfectly certain it never crossed Leslie's mind that it could be. He was a really gentle man who would not have wished to inflict pain: he was just too shy to talk to strangers.

It was not only young people who hung about the club. There

was one odd character whom we called Caravan Kate. She was a white-haired woman of at least sixty and she was mad about the movies. She had bought a caravan, parked it in a field next door to the studios and taken up residence there so that she could be constantly "in touch." She used to come into the club from time to time, indicating that she was "at liberty" if a suitable part for her was going in any of the films being, or about to be, produced at Pinewood.

One evening some incautious person asked Caravan Kate what she thought she could do in films. "Dance!" she replied in a deep voice. "*Dance?*" said the astonished bystanders. "Certainly. I shall show you," said Kate.

Floor space was cleared for her and, humming and chanting an eldritch snatch of tune, Kate went into an Eastern dance—tossing her wild, white locks, twirling her bony but still quite beautiful hands, and agitating her hips and stomach with the most unexpected *élan*. It was an extraordinary exhibition—and we didn't know whether to laugh or cry. While it was still going on, Leslie Howard walked into the room. Kate stopped dancing. "Mr. Howard!" she said breathlessly, "I want *you* to see this. I'll begin at the beginning." A look of terror passed over Leslie's face—but he stayed, motionless, pipe in hand, and watched the whole of Kate's performance. At the end of it, Kate, gasping for breath, turned to Leslie Howard and made him a wonderfully dignified yet humble curtsy. There was a very soft look in his eyes as he went up to her, took her hand and said, "Thank you." And we all felt ashamed that we had even thought of laughing at her.

VI

DOG DAYS AT DENHAM

"War Clouds Gather..."

During the summer of 1939, I was asked to work on the script of "An Englishman's Home"—a patriotic melodrama of the pre-World War One period, designed to persuade the English youth of that day to join the Territorials. Somebody had decided that an up-to-date version of this stirring work would be timely and acceptable.

There were, I was told, already three scripts of "An Englishman's Home" in existence—one by Edward Knoblock, one by Ian Hay and one by Dennis Wheatley, three writers so well known and practised that it seemed surprising to me that they had not been able to satisfy the producer. I was rather pleased at having been chosen as the writer likely to present the company with a more acceptable script—and I admit I was chagrined to find, on arriving at the Denham Studios, that Richard Llewellyn, Clifford Grey (lyric writer of "The Lambeth Walk") and Dora Nirva were all there, sitting in separate offices, busily writing different scripts of the same subject. I settled down in my own little office wondering who else would be called in on the job: the policy seemed to be to leave no scriptwriter unturned.

Each scriptwriter was kept more or less in a watertight compartment but naturally we were consumed with curiosity about each other's work. Occasionally one of us would manage to get hold of a rival script and then three would read through the latest scenes cooked-up by the unfortunate fourth—and every line would be greeted with shrieks of laughter. Richard Llewellyn's efforts, in particular, used to have us rolling in the aisles—though I don't suppose they were more absurd than our own. The subject was one that lent itself to absurdity.

We found Richard a very individual character but his colourful and somewhat flamboyant clothes inspired us with no confi-

dence in him as a writer. When, a year or two later, he emerged as the author of "How Green was My Valley," stupefaction would be a mild term to describe his fellow scriptwriters' feelings.

A newly-formed company was to make "An Englishman's Home" for United Artists: the backing for the film was supplied—or so the rumour went—by a commercial magnate and many of the minor executives on this new company were his relations. Neither he nor they knew anything of the workings of the film industry, and most of them seemed to know very little about anything (apart, perhaps, from commerce). One of the brood was continually accosting me in the Denham passages with the query, "Got enough dialogue for to-day?" "I'm not quite sure but I'll look in the refrigerator and see," I replied facetiously when he had made the inquiry once too often to be borne.

The word "facetious" led to a great deal of argument with the same executive: he objected to my having put it into the mouth of one of the characters in the film.

"Look here, Ackland, this is all very well," he said reproachfully, "but we want to make money out of this pitcher. We've got to think of the people in the one-and-threes: they don't like these fancy words of more than three syllables."

He sounded so much like the conventional caricature of a film producer in *Punch* of twenty years ago that it took me some moments to collect myself sufficiently to reply: "But facetious is a perfectly ordinary word—anyone knows what it means."

"O.K. then, we'll see," said the executive, rather truculently. He flung open the office door, peered out into the passage: a young typist came along and the executive beckoned her: "Here—come in here a minute, miss." She came in. "Now," he said, hooking his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, "do you know what facetious means?" "Yes, of course," said the girl. "It means sort of trying to be funny." She looked at him suspiciously: was *he* trying to be funny? "O.K.—that's all," said the executive crossly. The girl withdrew, bewildered. I forget just how the gentleman covered up his discomfiture but I imagine he mumbled something about what was the world coming to with typists being educated above their station.

The discussion was really quite without point because the dialogue that was finally recorded in "An Englishman's Home" had little relation to anything written by myself or by Edward Knob-

lock, Ian Hay, Dennis Wheatley, Richard Llewellyn, Dora Nirva and Clifford Grey. It was nearly all written by Albert de Courville, who was directing the film.

The promoters had their own ideas of how the English way of life should be shown on the screen.

The Englishman—a supposedly typical upper middle-class father-of-a-family—dwelt in a bogus-Tudor manor of Albert Hall-like proportions, the lounge of which (with staircase, gallery and a front door opening on to the garden) had an enormous radio-gram at either end.

When, in the opening sequence, Edmund Gwenn, as the Englishman, returned from a trip to America, he sat straight down at the refectory table (without even going upstairs for a wash, which seemed a little odd) and started on a meal that had been laid out for him: this appeared to be the high-tea of tinned salmon and pineapple-chunks popular with the lower middle and working classes of the period. His family sat down with him. And so did Nora Howard as the housekeeper, who apparently ran the Olde Tudor manor single-handed as, throughout the course of the film, no other domestics appeared.

An Australian actress named Mary Maguire played the heroine and Paul Henried (or Paul von Hernried as he was then) played the German spy who, insinuating himself into the Englishman's home, contrived to set up in the attic what was presumably an early form of radar equipment to guide enemy planes over London when, at the climax of the story, Germany sent a tremendous force of bombers to pulverize the capital, without having declared war.

I say Germany because I can't remember what Ruritania place-name was used: this was the post-Munich period when Hitler mustn't be upset and some odd-sounding name had inevitably to be devised. Nevertheless, it was quite clear that the country was supposed to be Germany: it was thus decidedly curious that the invading Nazis had been cast almost entirely from amongst people who had uncompromisingly Jewish noses. They were known in the studios as "The Lost Tribe."

Paul Henried was in those days languid and willowy: he wore elegant monogrammed silk shirts, which I envied him, and a supercilious look, for which no one could blame him. He had obviously been accustomed to better things than he was offered here—to working with people who knew everything about the cinema and

acting in films that made absolute sense.

As the spy who had ingratiated himself with the English family, Mr. Henried was invited by the Englishman to join the others on a picnic. He looked such an unlikely person to relish this sort of junketing that I was curious to see how the scene had been written. It opened thus :

Fade In : Medium shot picnic group.

Paul : " I love your English countryside."

Mary Maguire : " Yes, it's ideal for picnics."

(*She helps her father to open a crate of champagne.*)

I felt some protest was called for and said, " But an ordinary English family wouldn't take a crate of champagne on a picnic ! "

" What would they take, then ? " I was asked.

" They'd take tea," I said.

" TEA ? " It was as if I had meant to be offensive.

I racked my brains to think of a way of describing tea to people who had apparently never heard of it.

" What do you mean—*tea* ? " they said.

" I mean they'd take tea," I said helplessly. " You know—it's what people drink at tea-time."

They looked at me scornfully and shook their heads in pity for my ignorance. " The public isn't interested in tea," they said, and walked away.

I rather hoped that Edmund Gwenn would back me up but Mr. Gwenn had no doubt been conditioned to the Hollywood theory that the less a movie has to do with reality the better. Anyway, when I suggested he should tell our promoters they were wrong he merely patted my arm and said cosily, " My dear boy, what does it matter so long as they're happy ? "

Mary Pickford, visiting the studio as a United Artists' executive, seemed rather to admire the monstrous " lounge " set and was, so far as one saw, perfectly happy about the whole thing : I resolved to worry no more.

The four scriptwriters continued writing their four different scripts : meanwhile the film went on the floor and the actors performed a totally unrelated version of " An Englishman's Home."

This did not worry anybody working on the picture—until one day the owners of the studios indicated that unless the producer could let them have, within twenty-four hours, a full script (presumably so they could gauge the progress of the film and the length

of time it would take to complete it), Mr. de Courville would have to find some other studio to shoot it in.

News of this bombshell was conveyed to the associate producer, Reginald Fogwell, who immediately made a gallant offer. "Don't worry," he said "By this time to-morrow I will provide a complete shooting-script that will satisfy everybody."

Dora, Clifford, Richard and I were surprised and incredulous—but on looking up Mr. Fogwell in the "Film Encyclopedia" we discovered that he had, in fact, a number of scripts to his credit, including "Eileen of the Trees."

I had to report to one of the high-ups next morning that I'd got "enough dialogue for to-day"; I entered his office at an unfortunate moment. One of the actresses was throwing an inkwell in his direction. I retired tactfully, without waiting to see if she scored a hit—and hurried off down the corridor to the nearest office belonging to the "Englishman's Home" unit. It happened to be Reginald Fogwell's

I rushed in saying: "I must tell you what's just happened . . ." I had forgotten Fogwell's ambitious offer of the previous day and was terribly taken aback when I saw the deathly pallor of his face and the haunted look in his hollow eyes. I stopped short. He got shakily to his feet and advanced on me in the manner of Conrad Veidt in "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari." I backed away as he stretched out a trembling hand towards me. "I'm frightfully sorry, old boy," he said, his voice becoming fainter with each word, "but I'm afraid I . . ." He rolled up his eyes and fell forward in a dead faint.

Poor Fogwell! It appeared later that he had, indeed, during the last eighteen hours or so, written a complete and detailed shooting script and had just concluded it as I entered his office.

After helping to revive the faithful Fogwell, I hurried on to Albert de Courville's office, bursting now with *two* pieces of news. Some sort of conference was in progress: Albert, various executives and the other scriptwriters of "An Englishman's Home" were all shouting their heads off. I was a little disappointed: I had hoped to be the cause of considerable excitement. I needn't have worried—I *was* the cause of excitement. All the uproar was about a line I had written: I had made Geoffrey Toone, as the film's hero, quote Shakespeare. This, majority opinion considered, was something no self-respecting hero would ever do. Dora and

Clifford were arguing in my defence, but one member of the majority succeeded in talking them down.

"But Shakespeare's *poetry*," he expostulated, with an emphasis on the final word that suggested it almost made him sick to utter it. "You can't have a *man* quoting poetry! Why, that's . . . that's . . ." he groped frantically for an expression contemptuous enough to express his feelings: "That's *poof's* talk!" he finished triumphantly, glaring round as if daring anyone to deny such an obvious truth. Dora Nirva had screaming hysterics and was carried to the first-aid room.

"An Englishman's Home," after much sturm und drang, was eventually finished. By the time it had its world première at the London Pavilion, England was already at war and German raiders had flown over London, destroying, along with so much else, any lingering illusion or faint hope, to which the producer and director clung, that the public would find the film timely and acceptable.

Paul Holt, the *Daily Express* critic at that time, used a chart in his weekly article, meticulously grading the films under review according to their merits. The chart was headed POOR—FAIR—GOOD—VERY GOOD—EXCELLENT—BRILLIANT. A line ran under these headings, sometimes stopping halfway through FAIR, meaning presumably that his opinion of the picture as fairly good was qualified, or stretching right to the end of BRILLIANT to indicate the ultimate degree of enthusiasm. For "An Englishman's Home" he had a tiny, weeny, almost infinitesimal mark at the beginning of POOR.

"A Reserved Young Man"

Screen-writing during the war was a "reserved occupation." I cannot pretend that I was not glad of this but, like other screen-writers who did not join up, I suffered from a conscience. We did want to contribute in some useful way to the war effort and a number of us volunteered our services, as near free of charge as possible, in the making of propaganda films for the M.O.I. (Ministry of Information).

My first assignment was on a picture which we named "A Call for Arms": its object was to persuade shop girls, typists, manicurists, in fact all young women engaged in anything but war work,

to become munition workers. The director was an old friend of mine, Brian Desmond Hurst, a gloriously crazy Irishman.

Some years previously, Brian had established himself as a film director by making an amateur picture of "The Telltale Heart" for three thousand pounds and selling it to a commercial company for general release. It came about in this way: Brian met another wild Irishman at a cocktail party and, while discussing the Art of the Cinema, boasted that, given enough capital and a free hand, he could direct a film which artistically would be years ahead of anything turned out by American or British studios.

"How much capital do you want?" asked the other Irishman.

"Three thousand pounds," said Brian.

Without another word his fellow film enthusiast wrote out a cheque and gave it to him.

The shock had a sobering effect on Brian. He studied the other man carefully: was this the sort of fellow, now, who'd regret in the morning the generous gesture of the night before? If one took him at his word, would he be likely to cut up rough about it afterwards? Brian hoped not, for the man was a broad-shouldered six-foot-three and was accompanied at the party by three sisters all six-foot-three-and-a-half: it was not a family one would willingly provoke to violence. He decided he would have to take a chance.

At 9.45 a.m. next day Brian was waiting at the bank on which the cheque was drawn, so that he could dash in on the stroke of ten o'clock and get the three thousand pounds in cash: he still had a feeling that its donor might well wake with a hangover, ask himself "What on earth was I up to last night?" recall the rash gift and telephone the bank to have the cheque stopped. The cheque was met. "The Telltale Heart" and Brian's reputation were made. British and American critics praised the film—and (to prove how gripping it was) nobody noticed that the leading feminine role was played by two different actresses, the first one having decided halfway through the film that she was in need of a holiday.

For some obscure reason, which I can't recall, Brian and I decided that our principal characters in "A Call for Arms," the munitions-propaganda film, would be two chorus girls. The sight of a girl from a munitions factory fainting away after a sixteen-hour shift would prick their consciences and bring home to them the uselessness of their lives: they would rush away from the glamour of the footlights through the stage door of the Granville

Theatre, Walham Green, and, panting to get their hands on some munitions, present themselves at the nearest Labour Exchange.

Rene Ray and Jean Gillie were cast as the converted troupers—and I managed to work in my sister Kay and a chum of hers as two other (less patriotic) troupers who were seen in the background of one shot “Shuffling off to Buffalo” instead of to the factory bench.

“Vibrations and Karma”

Brian was to produce and direct the film and, as he was a friend of mine, I saw an opportunity to forward my old ambition, damped down by now but ready to burst into flame at a breath of encouragement: I asked if I might assist with the direction. Brian, with his customary amiability, said it was O.K. by him—and there I was, nearer my goal than I had ever been in my life.

The factory scenes were to be shot at Woolwich Arsenal and on the first day of shooting the “Call for Arms” unit presented itself there and found that, before anything could be done, a call for calm would have to be made: the effect of our arrival on the factory workers was extraordinary and disconcerting. The females were beside themselves with excitement and, neglecting their work, carried on as if demented: applying an additional layer of make-up to their already made-up faces, they darted about in our vicinity laughing hysterically, like so many variously aged and sized Ophelias, while the males scowled at us, muttered menacingly or derisively, and spat.

Brian delegated me to get some “atmosphere shots” in the ladies wash-room: the girls were to be shown getting hats and coats from their lockers, washing their hands and gossiping at the end of a shift. It sounded perfectly simple and, in a normal atmosphere, would have been—but the girls were too excited at the thought of appearing “on the pictures” to behave normally. I explained the action I wanted from them and asked them to go through the movements I had suggested. The effect was ludicrous: their nervous gestures made the scene look like one from a very old film projected at top speed, with all the characters jerking and hustling about like marionettes with St. Vitus’ dance.

I talked to them soothingly at some length and at last they calmed down enough to make it possible to start shooting. The moment I had dreamed of for so many years had come: following

cries from the second assistant of "Turn 'em over!" I called "Action!" and the first scene directed by Rodney Ackland was recorded on celluloid. The camera had only been turning a moment or two when a young woman, whose film ambitions were apparently as strong as my own, rushed up to it, stuck her face as close to the lens as possible and began "emoting." I told the cameraman to cut and asked the girl what all that was about: well, she said, she had meant to convey that she had just received a telegram announcing that her brother had been killed in action.

By the time I had persuaded her that, although the realism of such a situation could not be questioned, all I wanted to show on the screen was the girls putting on their hats and coats at the end of a shift, the lunch break was called. It was around five o'clock in the afternoon before we got my first directed shot in the can. It appeared for a brief flash in the completed picture, but even in that flash—and how the girl achieved this is still a mystery to me—a face obtruded itself, registering with dilated eyes and quivering lips some profound and entirely uncalled-for emotion.

"A Call for Arms," when projected in a rough-cut for M.O.I. officials, caused much controversy. Exception was taken to the scene in which a munitions worker fainted after doing a sixteen-hour shift. Although sixteen-hour shifts in an emergency were not unknown, it was felt that attention should not be drawn to them. On the other hand, there was nothing against showing a girl fainting, so the scene was retained with the alteration of a single (hyphenated) word in the dialogue: the fainting girl's mum, raising her overworked child in her arms, looked reproachfully at the two conscience-stricken chorines and informed them, in tragic, proud and patriotic tones: "She's just done an *eight-hour* shift!"

All the documentary boys who were working for the M.O.I. derided our munitions-propaganda effort as melodramatic and unreal, which, indeed, it was. But the effect of the picture on the younger generation of feminine film-goers when it was shown—as all M.O.I. films had to be shown—in every "Odeon" throughout the land, was exactly what Brian and I had intended and the M.O.I. had hoped for. In point of fact, results exceeded expectation: Labour Exchanges were besieged by young women demanding to be sent to munitions factories. As there was no machinery to cope with the rush, back they had to go to their "useless" occupations behind counters, in tea-shops and restaurants, waving

hair and manicuring nails, or "Shuffling off to Buffalo" on the stage of the Granville, Walham Green.

Brian and I continued to work together and our next assignment was a film for the War Office in which women were to be instructed how to behave if a German parachutist, with tommy gun, landed in the back garden.

We decided to make a terse and telling little drama—it had to be terse as these M.O.I. films only ran for five minutes—and two very talented non-star actresses, Phyllis Morris and Nellie Bowman, were engaged to play the parts of elderly spinsters, living in an isolated country house, on whom a Nazi parachutist one night dropped in. Petrified at first, they soon pulled themselves together and while one held the parachutist at bay (I can't remember how she did this but it may have been with the assegai Pappa brought back from the Zulu war) the other dashed off on an ancient bicycle to summon the Home Guard.

The actresses gave superb performances. Their terror when the sinister face of the Nazi materialized in the moonlight outside their sitting-room window was particularly effective—so much so that when a rough-cut was screened for the War Office brass-hats, a Brigadier-General said he had never been so scared in his life. The picture was pronounced far too frightening to be shown: the whole thing must be shot again as a comedy. Back we went to the studios and shot it again as a comedy.

To my regret, Miss Morris and Miss Bowman were deprived of the parts they had, perhaps, played only too well. Since they had made the Brigadier-General quiver in his seat with sympathetic fear, it may have been assumed that they would not be able to make an audience rock with laughter. Or possibly the War Office, becoming increasingly professional in its film producing capacity, had merely echoed the Wardour Street cry: "We must have Names!" Anyway, the two original actresses were replaced with stars.

Mary Clare and Martita Hunt were now the surprised spinsters. The plot remained the same but, instead of being frightened of the Nazi, they both treated the apparition in the garden with magnificent sang-froid and Mary Clare, dashing off to fetch the Home Guard, leapt upon her bicycle with a light laugh.

The teaming of these two fine and temperamental actresses was expected in the unit to lead to a nice collection of theatrical anec-

dotes but, to our disappointment, they both behaved beautifully and treated each other with unfailing courtesy. There were, however, two other actresses, working on another production at Denham, whose exchanges afforded us a little malicious amusement. One of them, pausing at the other's table during lunch in the canteen, cast a glance at her plate and murmured, "Oh . . . ham, dear. Just the thing for you!"—and passed on before her rival could reply. The wise-cracking between jealous leading ladies is rarely, I have found, as witty as one would like it to be.

The film, which was called "Miss Grant goes to the Door," pleased everybody and even earned a leader in the *Daily Express*, singling it out as an example of what an M.O.I. propaganda film should be. Unlike "A Call for Arms," however, its propaganda had little or no effect. When, a few months afterwards, a gentle rain of German parachutists fell from Heaven upon the back gardens beneath, the British housewife invariably tucked them up on the sofa and brought them nice cups of tea.

As with the munitions film, I had an "Assistant Director" credit on "Miss Grant" which I felt could not have escaped the notice of the big-wigs. When, some time afterwards, I wrote, in collaboration with my old friend Arthur Boys, the script for a half-hour film to be shown exclusively in the United States with the idea of increasing American sympathy for the blitzed British, I hoped I might persuade the authorities to let me direct it.

This bright hope was strangled at birth. Carol Reed had already been approached and was keen to do it. Four years previously when Carol directed "Bank Holiday" the script had been handed to him as a *fait accompli*: apart from Hans Wilhelm's and my three or four wraithlike visits to the studio during shooting, I had had little chance to get to know him.

Over the film for America, Arthur and I had several script conferences with this admired director—who seemed to be rushing two rungs at a time up the ladder on which I had not as yet been able to place more than the toe of one foot. We all saw eye to eye and our conferences were a miracle of calm and sanity, bearing no resemblance to the series of "Mad Hatter's" tea-parties that had preceded "An Englishman's Home."

I was resolved at the outset not to allow envy of Carol's directorial position and prestige to claw at my vitals and, because of his gentle charm, easy friendliness and sense of fun, I found this good

resolution easy to keep. My regard for him even survived one very considerable jolt: I discovered in conversation with him that *The Most Promising Director in British Films* had no such fanatic passion as mine for the Art of the Motion Picture—and had never had one.

He had never sat in the ninepennies watching the classics of the silent screen unroll before his hypnotized schoolboy's eyes, had never attempted to break into studio-doors or hopefully paced the pavements of Wardour Street with a film-struck sister whose battle-cry was "Goodbye, Pearl!"; he had never, in fact, given the cinema much thought until he happened to be offered a job in it after several years in the theatre, stage-managing for Edgar Wallace. It did seem jolly unfair that I, who had . . . I could only say to myself, in the words with which I'd made the character played by Laura Cowie in "Strange Orchestra" console the less philosophic types in that play: "It's all vibrations and Karma, dear."

There were certainly plenty of vibrations during these conferences: daylight raids were frequent and window-panes, doors, ornaments and crockery vibrated to the bombs and gunfire in a rhythm as inimical to creative thought as that of my own spiritual vibrations seemed to be to film producers.

Despite the din and disturbances, Carol, Arthur and I vibrated in sufficient harmony to agree that the one actress who would be right for our heroine was Celia Johnson. It was, of course, Carol, in his capacity as director, who would have to fight for this idea, which we knew beforehand would not be popular.

The anticipated objections were forthcoming: that Miss Johnson was not photogenic, that she positively could not be photographed, that she was not glamorous, was too tall, too thin—and that her eyes were too big for her face and her name was not big enough for America. Carol won the battle; long before "Brief Encounter" was born or thought of (if one may use such a Nannie's expression about a moving picture), Celia Johnson, as a mother whose two small children had been evacuated to New York while she braved the horrors of queueing, rationing and the blitz, gave a beautifully true and tender performance in a film never shown to the British public.

During the shooting of this picture, which we called "A Letter from Home," Celia collected a specimen of British understatement

which should surely win all prizes. On the way to the studio one morning, she gave a lift to a young lady shop-assistant. They exchanged bomb stories. Celia's passenger had a "refained" accent.

"Mai auntee," she said, "had a nawsty experience—very nawsty, it was, reelly."

"What was that?" asked Celia.

"She was in a surface shelter and a bomb fell raight on it."

"Oh, how *awful* for her. Was she hurt?"

"Oh yais. Her head was blown raight off."

"A Letter from Home," when shown in America, was praised by the Press over there and received laudatory notices in *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Whether or not it had its intended effect upon the American public there was no means of telling: there certainly seemed to be an increased rush of "Bundles For Britain" across the Atlantic and we rather liked to think that this was in some measure a result of our efforts.

VII

49TH PARALLEL

"A Lady Vanishes—and a Gentleman, too . . ."

At some time during my work on these propaganda efforts came an unexpected summons from the commercial film world. I have now only the vaguest recollection of the date when this happened but at the time—at least during some moments of romantic and self-indulgent speculation following the telephone call—it seemed to me that this might well be the opening of a vital sequence of events in film history, the date of which would have to be memorized by any student of the cinema who hoped to win a film degree. I could visualize it in the text-books, recorded with other significant dates for cineastes: "April, 1940. Art of Cinema Revolutionized. Rodney Ackland Directs his First Film." But, as I say, the date turned out to be so insignificant that whether it was, in fact, April when I went to Warner Brothers' Studios as director-for-a-day, I cannot myself remember. I only know that it must have been in the first half of 1940 because the blitz had not yet started.

The episode remains in my mind merely as another instance of those tortures-of-Tantalus which film executives so ingeniously and frequently devise for certain types of their employees—though in this case the cup offered to me, filled with the "heady wine" of feature-film direction, was whisked from under my nose almost before I had time to realize that it was being offered. To this day, I can't be sure that I wasn't deluding myself about the whole thing.

Somewhere around the beginning of the war I had written for Warner's a screen adaptation of Gerald Savory's play, "George and Margaret"; I had heard that it was going into production at Teddington so when "Doc" Solomon, the head something-or-other of the studios, telephoned to ask me to go down and see them I concluded that Warner-British must have brought Edward G. Robinson and Barbara Stanwyck over from Hollywood to play the

title roles and, having discovered, on a close scrutiny of the script, that these characters never appear, were in desperate need of my services.

I imagined that "Doc" Solomon had gravitated to the film industry from the medical profession but learned that he had been in the business since he was so high and that the nickname by which everybody knew him dated from the time when he had been in charge of the "scenery dock." He was a tough, rather endearing little man with a voice like a buzz-saw, though a kindly one which, if it were about to cut Pearl White to pieces at the end of an episode, would somehow reassure her that what was about to happen would hurt *her* more than it would hurt itself. To express more simply the impression made on me by Doc's voice, it resembled the croaking of a raven with a sore throat.

As I had assumed that I had been sent for to revise the script, while Doc appeared to have something quite else on his mind, our conversation started at cross purposes and continued mystifyingly for a long time; at last I realized that he was asking me to direct some tests for "George and Margaret" as Warner Brothers had not yet signed up a director for the film. I jumped headlong to the conclusion that the tests were designed not only for the purpose of finding the right actors but also to try me out as a possible director.

Almost every director I had ever watched at work seemed, having generally graduated from the cutting-room or the clapper-board, to know nothing whatever about acting: there were, of course, two notable exceptions—Griffith, himself an ex-actor, and Hitchcock, who always gave a much more vivid performance when showing his actors what to do than they ever achieved themselves. I persuaded myself that, considering my years of earning a living on the boards, my scholarship to Miss Fogerty's and the fact that I had sometimes directed the tours and "Q" or Embassy revivals of my plays, there was no reason why I shouldn't have Doc Solomon goggling with excitement and contemplating cables to Hollywood when he saw me at work.

My assignment for the day, I discovered on arrival at Teddington, was to make a test of Oliver Wakefield and a young actress—whom I'll call Miss Blank as I cannot remember whether she got the part—in a love scene. This was child's play, I decided—particularly as Oliver was an old chum who had once done one-

night-stands with me in John Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" with the Lena Ashwell Players. I had played the young soldier condemned to death—and I recalled how, after my big scene every night, I used to rush to the prompt corner to try to find a hole through which to look at the audience and ascertain how many of them were sobbing. Oliver had appeared as John Wilkes Booth and there was a delightful occasion when, on making his dramatic entrance in the last act, he found himself without a pistol: disconcerted but resourceful, the assassin pointed his index finger at President Lincoln and said "Bang!"

I spent a long time rehearsing Oliver and Miss Blank, giving them every move, intonation, gesture and facial expression. When we were ready to shoot, Doc Solomon, accompanied by several intimidating-looking executive types, came on the floor and stood behind me. The young players took up their positions, the arc-lamps fizzed into incandescence, whistles blew and the assistant yelled "Roll 'em!" I sank into the director's chair and waited for the acting to begin.

There was a pause, an atmosphere of uncertainty. The actor and actress seemed to be waiting for something. Something appeared to have gone wrong. "Go on . . ." I said to Miss Blank and Oliver in a whisper. They sent troubled, enquiring glances at me. What on earth could be holding them up? I wondered.

A voice croaked in my ear, so close that it made me jump. It said, "Action!" I turned to find Doc's face almost touching mine. "I beg your pardon?" I said. "Action!" he croaked again with a sort of desperate ferocity.

"But I've *given* them the action," I explained. "Anyway, there isn't much action—it's a love scene."

"Action!" he repeated with even greater ferocity, surprising in such a kindly man: he bared his teeth and glared at me as though he were about to lose his mind.

I gazed at him helplessly for a moment and—just in time to prevent a further croaking outburst that would certainly have deprived him of his voice—at last realized what he was driving at.

"Oh, I see . . . of course . . . how stupid of me . . . terribly sorry . . ." I murmured. Turning back to Oliver and Miss Blank, who were still waiting, I opened my mouth and such a frenzied yell of "Action!" rang through the studio that the actors commenced their love scene with quite inappropriately startled expressions

(and I almost leapt out of the director's chair, shocked at the noise I had made). They soon recovered, however, and played the scene as well as I had hoped they would.

For some minutes after they'd finished it, I contemplated them admiringly. Again there was that atmosphere of uncertainty, of everybody waiting for something. "Well, I think you both did that beautifully," I began, feeling something was expected of me. "I don't know whether you'd like to have another shot at it . . ." A penetrating croak interrupted me. Doc was at it again: "*Cut!*" He was baring his teeth against my ear.

"Oh! Do you think the scene's too long?" I enquired.

"*CUT!*"

Our noses were touching now. I drew back slightly, trying not to look put out: "Well, I will if you like, but it's a fairly tautly-written scene. I don't quite see what we *can* cut without losing something vital," I said.

He went on glaring at me for a moment, then turned to the cameraman. He was obviously trying to say "*Cut*" but only the sound of harsh, desperate breathing issued from his mouth. I realized my mistake. I hastened to apologize. "So sorry," I said. "Terribly stupid of me . . . I was so taken up with watching the acting . . ."

"*Cut!*" said one of the executives standing behind me. His voice was firm and icy.

The camera stopped turning. The actors relaxed. The assistant yelled, "Pull the breakers!" The lights went out. Everyone walked off the set. I remained for some moments in the darkness, brooding on the difficulties of film-making for those who, however enamoured with the Art of the Cinema, were not very quick in the uptake. Then, abdicating from the director's chair, I too walked off the set.

When the film of "George and Margaret" went into production, some weeks later, it was directed by George King.

"Banished to the Grindstone . . ."

The propaganda grindstone was whirring away at terrific speed by now, and back to it I went. As though reverting to the early days of the Bioscope, every studio in Britain was turning out, for various Ministries, dramas and comedies five hundred feet long,



"JUST ANOTHER THRILLER . . ."

But Hitch intended a Burlesque. John Stuart and Ann Casson in

"Number 17"



MY FIRST SCREEN APPEARANCE (Marked with arrow)
 "The Skin Game" : in the front row, Edward Chapman, John Longden
 and Edmund Gwenn



"DON'T HE CRY NATURAL!"

lasting five minutes. "Miss Grant Goes to the Door" still remained a classic of these minuscule films: the real classics of British screen propaganda—major works like Harry Watt's "Target for Tonight" and Humphrey Jennings's "Fires were Started"—needed the real war, it would seem, for inspiration, and most of the little efforts I was called to work on, telling the public how to behave in various circumstances which at that period could only be imagined, must have been as phoney as the "phoney war" itself.

To continue—though with a certain amount of strain—the analogy with ancient bioscope, Michael Powell suddenly displayed a daring which made him, as it were, the Griffith *de nos jours*. In 1915, D. W. Griffith rocked the Hollywood producers of one- or at the very most two-reel films by embarking on an epic "with cast of many thousands" in no less than thirteen reels. In 1940, Michael Powell staggered the British film industry and particularly the Film Section of the Ministry of Information with his idea of making a full-length feature expressing What We Were Fighting For, the leading roles to be played by Star Names so awe-inspiring that the picture's exhibition in neutral countries, particularly the United States, would be entirely unavoidable. In case this vision seemed a little too grandiose to be practical, he would guarantee that all these fabulous stars would make sacrifices for the war effort and play for only half their normal salaries.

The M.O.I. Film Section had inaugurated an "Ideas Committee" and every week writers, directors and producers met—round a table so vast that, had a lady and gentleman in faultless evening dress been dining at either end of it, it could have been the popular Hollywood symbol of a loveless marriage. It must, I think, have been at one of these committee meetings that I first met Michael Powell and Emmerich Pressburger—the two most baffling characters I ever came across in the film industry, or, for that matter, anywhere else.

"Micky," as I came to know him, has a small child-like face with a tiny mouth, thin-lipped instead of rose-buddish, a far-away voice and the pale blue eyes which are supposed to denote fanaticism. His figure is slight and delicate, in marked contrast to that of his partner, who is rather short and stocky. It is difficult to guess what is going on behind Micky's ice-blue eyes—but the inscrutability of Pressburger's flat Hungarian face is complete and

would make the visages of Dr. Fu-manchu, Charlie Chan and the beloved po-face of Alan Ladd look, by comparison, like mirrors of tempestuous emotion.

After several weeks of working with Emmerich I knew no more about him than I did at our first encounter—except, perhaps, that he doesn't like unpunctuality. I am always at least half an hour late for a conference I would find him *gone*, sometimes leaving be-burger, had always managed to mollify my screen-collaborators, if they began to show signs of impatience, by thrusting upon them bunches of flowers or bottles of gin before they had time to complain. With Emmerich, if I arrived a second more than ten minutes late for a conference I would find him *gone*, sometimes leaving behind him a note with the uncompromising statement: "Couldn't wait any longer."

This behaviour was at least consistent and faced one with no more difficult problem than how to collaborate with a writer who vanished if one was eleven minutes late. Michael Powell's behaviour was rather more baffling—at least to one who had not worked with him before.

After one session of the Ideas Committee, I came face to face with Mr. Powell, who said: "I want you to play one of the Nazis in my film. Come and see me at eleven o'clock tomorrow." I went to see him at eleven o'clock (or possibly eleven minutes past eleven) next day and found I was to collaborate with Pressburger on the script: the question of my appearing in the film as a Nazi was not mentioned again.

Before my meeting with the "team" of Powell and Pressburger I had been fascinated by the joint "credit" on advertisements of their films—"Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emmerich Pressburger"—and had wondered how the two of them managed to direct a picture simultaneously without confusing the actors, tripping over each other on the floor, and generally getting in each other's hair. I discovered that the wording of this "credit" was a device of Micky's to ensure that his collaborator would get kudos where kudos was due—the critics until then having resolutely refrained from mentioning the author of a screen-play, implying by their omission that screen-plays were not written but conjured out of thick air by film directors when they went on the floor. Micky obviously felt that the screenwriter should share the praise or blame for the film and this I found en-

couraging.

The title of the Powell-Pressburger propaganda epic was to be "49th Parallel." The story concerned the mythical adventures of a Nazi U-boat crew who, shipwrecked off the coast of Canada, endeavoured to make their way across that British Dominion to the freedom of neutral America.

Powell and Pressburger travelled all over Canada collecting data for the story. My collaborator (Pressburger, who had devised the "story line") was therefore in a more favourable position than I found myself when, sitting on the lawn of the house at Peter-sham where I then lived, I was faced with having to write dialogue for Laurence Olivier as a French-Canadian trapper—though this was child's play compared with having to invent lines for several Eskimo characters who appeared towards the beginning of the film.

In addition to Olivier, Micky had signed up Anton Walbrook, Leslie Howard, Raymond Massey (who was in Canada) and Elizabeth Bergner to appear as the various and representative types encountered by Eric Portman (playing the U-boat captain) and his crew in their flight across Canada. Portman, though well-known in the theatre, meant, at that time, nothing at all in the cinema: he was signed by Micky not only because of his excellent record as a stage actor but because he was willing to spend four months with the unit in Canada while the real stars were not inclined to sacrifice more than a couple of weeks of their valuable time on the picture. Canadian "doubles" were used in long shots when the stars were not available, and Leslie Howard, reporting for duty, found himself doomed to wear the somewhat unbecoming clothes worn by his stand-in. "Couldn't he have worn something a little more fetching?" he asked Micky mildly—only to be told coldly, "If you had been here you could have had some say in the matter. As it is, you'll have to take what you find." It was Howard who, on seeing the rough-cut of the film, went to Micky and insisted that Portman should be given star billing on the strength of his magnificent performance. Micky eventually agreed—and thus Portman received some reward for the vicissitudes (of which more later) he had been forced to endure.

All the stars had agreed to play for half price and Elizabeth Bergner was said to have been even more generous and waived her salary completely. On hearing this I found my fiendish imagi-

nation painting for me a dear little scene: "Micky and Emmerich for once register surprise as the Bergner, with many an impish somersault, secures their attention and, bending to peer provocatively at them from between her legs, tells them, 'I do not wish *any* salary—you may keep it to buy a Spitfire!'"

Miss Bergner went off to join the unit in Canada, where Micky was already at work—but she did not stay there very long. I do not know the full story of what happened, but, from the many rather conflicting rumours, what emerged was that Miss Bergner had agreed to play the role but had not definitely committed herself and had now changed her mind. The only really unassailable fact was that instead of being on the plains of Alberta, Miss Bergner was in the swimming-pools of Hollywood.

Miss Bergner's part was taken over by Glynis Johns but as Miss Johns was then a child actress she could not be expected to have the emotional range required in the big scenes designed for Bergner—and most of these had to be cut. Before vanishing to Hollywood, the German star did a few days' work in the film and she does actually appear in it as a sun-bonneted figure in two or three long shots—though the innocent face framed by a sun-bonnet in the close-ups is that of the child Glynis, the little girl who has since become one of *our* leading stars.

During Miss Bergner's fugitive appearances before the camera in this film, we were told, there was a rather unfortunate incident. The Bergner sequence in "49th Parallel" concerned a religious community in Alberta known as the Hutterites. Fundamentalists, they had concluded from a passage in the Old Testament that the wearing of any sort of ornament was unattractive in the sight of God. Make-up and jewellery for the female Hutterites were considered sinful and the males were so anxious to avoid anything in the nature of adornment that they could not bring themselves to keep their clothes together with buttons. (A disconcerting deputation of male Hutterites arrived for a conference at Denham one day, all twelve of them looking like the young Bernard Shaw, in Norfolk jackets—buttonless—and long red beards.)

Bergner was to play a young Hutterite woman and as such she strolled on to the "lot" in the Hutterite settlement, where this section of the film was being made, wearing an appropriately modest gingham frock. But she was also wearing a full make-up, with glistening lips and false eyelashes—and she was smoking, holding

her cigarette in fingers with prettily varnished nails.

The Hutterite ladies, who had never seen a film actress before, were outraged—and one of them, succumbing to anger and bolder than the rest, made a dash at the “impious” star and soundly boxed her ears. After suffering such an indignity it is, perhaps, hardly to be wondered at that Miss Bergner left for Hollywood—where, at least, the natives accept make-up as a common necessity and the smoking of cigarettes (except, of course, “reefers”) is not frowned upon.

“The Perils of Portman . . .”

Eric Portman looks back on the making of “49th Parallel” and his four months in Canada with mixed feelings. On his return I tried to lure him into telling me something of his experiences but came up against his Yorkshire caution. “The scenery was incredibly beautiful,” he said. “And Micky?” I asked, “Simply incredible,” said Eric. It was not until we saw the finished picture and I commented on the St. Lawrence River and Lake Louise scenes that he opened up and revealed that these had given the actors some of the unhappiest days of their lives.

It was a fine day in early spring when Micky decided that the U-boat Portman commanded should sail up the St. Lawrence. The river is immensely wide and the current strong—and the “replica” submarine, though doubtless seaworthy, looked to the actors somewhat frail. They protested that they were not sailors and that, as the craft was not equipped with wireless and there was not another ship to be seen, they did not at all relish the idea of putting out into that vast waste of water: Micky, they said, could not be serious. But Micky was perfectly serious; realism demanded that the submarine should be seen sailing up the river and sail it must.

After further discussion, the submarine duly put out and proceeded up-river—and though all aboard (especially those who could not swim) had their hearts in their mouths the voyage ended without disaster. Micky let it be understood that he thought a great deal of unnecessary fuss had been made—but even he had to admit that the fuss made during shooting at Lake Louise was perhaps justifiable.

In this sequence, a stolen aircraft in which Portman and some of his crew, including the late Raymond Lovell, were attempting

a get-away was to be shown shot down in the lake. A specially constructed fuselage containing the unhappy actors was shoved out into the water. The actors were instructed to break out of it, dive under it and come up on the other side looking properly panic-stricken.

The unfortunate Raymond Lovell could not swim but he bravely made the jump with the rest, doubtless reckoning that he would be able to hang on to the fuselage and stay afloat until it was towed in. This he might well have done—but somebody at the last moment threw a stink-bomb into the water to add to the terror and confusion. The effect of this was so unexpectedly devastating that even the strongest swimmers found themselves momentarily in difficulties. Eric Portman, gasping for breath and striking out as best he could, suddenly looked round and realized that poor Lovell was literally drowning: he yelled for help. The cameraman gallantly plunged into the lake, knocking the camera in as he leapt, and swam to the rescue.

Lovell, unconscious, was hauled ashore, laid out on the grass and given artificial respiration. Portman, choking with rage and lake-water, and Micky, pale and shocked, stood by. To everyone's relief, Raymond Lovell was successfully revived and suffered no ill-effects.

"A Tale is Twisted..."

The whole meaning of "49th Parallel," as Emmerich, Micky and I had worked it out, was contained in the final sequence of the script: Eric Portman, as the one surviving Nazi, so misunderstood the workings of democracy that, crossing the 49th parallel (the frontier between Canada and the United States) expecting to find barbed wire, sentries and machine guns, he did not realize he was actually in neutral America—so, re-entering the cattle-truck in which he had been hiding, he was shunted back into Canada again.

On his return to England Micky ran a rough-cut of this sequence for me—and to my amazement and horror the scene as played was diametrically opposed to everything Emmerich and I had written: Raymond Massey as a Canadian farmer, the spokesman for democracy, now advanced on Portman, a hunted figure, starving and at the end of his tether, and rolled up his sleeves with

the intention of beating him up !

" But it's sheer Fascism ! " I protested to Micky. " You can't—you simply *can't* end the film like this ! Whose *idea* was it anyway ? "

Micky replied : " We were told that for Canadian audiences you've got to have action at the end of the picture. "

" But not *that* sort of revolting action ! Please, Micky, I beg you to change it—it's disastrous—it's Nazi propaganda ! "

Micky said nothing, and clearly did not agree. The film was shown with that ending.

An elegant luncheon to celebrate the première of the film was given at Claridges and after Mr. Oscar Deutsch had asked the Lord to make us truly grateful for what we were about to receive " and always mindful of the need of others " and we had stuffed ourselves with food, Micky Powell rose to make a speech. He thanked everybody, from stars to clapper boy, who had been connected with " 49th Parallel "—that is to say, he thanked everybody except Miss Bergner and me. Nothing was said about either of us. I concluded that Micky Powell had not liked my work on the film and, as I had put the best of myself into it, that in fact he did not like my work at all, but events proved that I must have been in error.

I did not see him again until many years later when I met him by chance in the street. He asked me to lunch and told me that he admired my work so much that he would like to produce a play of mine in the West End. He gave me a thousand pounds for an option on two plays. When arrangements were going ahead for the production of the first one, Micky got in touch with me to say there was a brilliant young actress playing with the Oxford repertory company whom he thought should play one of the leads and whom he would drive me down to see the following week. That was in the summer of 1950—and I have never seen Michael Powell nor had any communication from him from that day to this.

VIII

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

"Their Only Sin was Motherhood . . ."

The studio door at Denham remained hospitably open to me and next thing I knew I was back in an office off the long corridor where I had dodged the backer's relatives during the production of that eccentric work "An Englishman's Home." The assignment this time was a pleasant one: I was to write, in collaboration with a colleague from the Continent, a script for Brian Desmond Hurst. I cannot for the life of me remember what it was about though I vaguely recall that it had some connection with the sea and a scene of the heroine sewing comes dimly back to me. What she was sewing and why and for whom must remain a mystery, since the film was never made.

By this time we were in the middle of the heaviest blitz of the war. Getting to Denham—and particularly getting back—presented many difficulties. Each morning one would arrive at the studio in some trepidation as to whether or not one still had a collaborator—and each night one would return home devoutly hoping one still had a mother. Brian Desmond Hurst was living in a house called, surprisingly enough, "Wardrobes," not far from Denham. He suggested that work on the script would be facilitated if we joined him there.

My collaborator and I went into conference on this proposition and came to the conclusion that we could hardly work peacefully in the comparatively blitz-free countryside while our two Mums braved the bombs in London. We told Brian, rather nervously, that we would be delighted to accept his invitation on condition that our mothers came too. Living as he does an Irish version of *La Vie de Bohème*, Brian was, we felt, unlikely to welcome the introduction of two elderly ladies into his crazy ménage. He didn't care for the idea at all—but he saw our point, of course. After considerable discussion it was decided that we should bring our

maternal parents to Princes Risborough, where "Wardrobes" was situated, and install them in rooms there.

The district was seething with evacuees from London and it was no easy matter to find accommodation. The best thing we could find was a double bedroom, for which the proprietors were charging practically Claridges' rates, over a rather broken-down shop in Aylesbury. We tried to give the Mums an impression of what sort of place they would be staying at—though emphasizing, of course, that they were lucky to get a room at all—but neither of them seemed to take it in.

The morning of the evacuation dawned and we started off early by road—the Continental Mum optimistically bringing with her a trunkful of evening gowns and a budgerigar in a cage. Her son and I set off with somewhat sinking hearts and they sank several degrees lower when it became clear, by the time we got on to the Great North Road, that the British Mum and the Continental Mum had taken an instant dislike to each other.

Arrived at Aylesbury we saw them and their belongings into the double room—and hastened away as fast as we could from the sight of their pale, dismayed faces. That pathetic sight haunted us throughout the day as we worked at Denham—though we congratulated ourselves on having, at least, removed our mothers from the perils of the blitz and tried to reassure each other that they would "soon settle down and make the best of it."

We returned to Aylesbury that evening with the intention of taking our mothers to dine at a neighbouring hotel. We found them in the middle of a dramatic scene with the café proprietors who were about to turn them into the street as German spies. Mother was keeping up a haughty "my good woman" attitude—but her room-mate, also an ex-actress and one who had played Ophelia in her time, put on a transpontine act of tears and hand-wringings which proved more efficacious than Mother's restrained performance and resulted in the two ladies receiving grudging permission to stay "one night and be out of the place by nine o'clock in the morning." Depleted with indignation and emotion, we had a sad little supper of cold ham. The continental evening gowns remained unpacked.

Later that night my collaborator and I were on our way back to "Wardrobes." Aylesbury was a mile or two behind us when I said to him, "Well, whatever happens, the Mums will have had

one night in peace—away from the bombs.” At this moment, from a mile or two behind us, came the shattering roar of an explosion and looking back we saw the sky over Aylesbury so hideously lit up as to suggest that the whole town had been blown to blazing atoms.

From the nearest telephone booth we called up the shop. Every window, we were told, had been blown out and the black-out curtains cut to ribbons—but the two Mums were unharmed. We retrieved them in the morning.

After several hours of searching, we found a vacant bed-sitting-room in Princes Risborough. As, the moment we had arrived at Aylesbury, the Continental Mum had clutched her son’s hand, drawn him aside and moaned, “My dear, what I’ve been through with that woman!”—and as my mother had done precisely the same with me—it was mutually agreed that, for the benefit of all concerned, Mother should have the bed-sitter and the Continental Mum come to “Wardrobes” until we found somewhere else. The ladies, registering relief that the ordeal was over and the adversity which had made reluctant bedfellows of them had been conquered, bade each other farewell with compressed lips and in practically inaudible voices.

My colleague and his mother and I arrived back at “Wardrobes” to find Brian wild-eyed with worry: he would, he said, do his best for the Continental Mum—but the difficulty of finding her somewhere to lay her head had been increased by the arrival, half an hour before, of two more refugees from the blitz. These were a young man who had played the bass with Snakehips Johnson’s band (of which, I believe, he was the only survivor after the Café de Paris received a direct hit) and Hermione Gingold who had been bombed out of her flat the previous night.

In addition to the (generally) genial host, Miss Gingold, the bass player, my collaborator and myself and the Continental Mum, the demented household already included what reviewers, referring to the characters in my plays, always call “a strangely assorted group.” There were a very Russian ballet mistress with a voice so deep that by comparison everyone else’s seemed falsetto; a manservant who stamped about in a perpetual rage, and, as a transient visitor, an R.A.F. admirer of Miss Gingold’s about whom she sometimes complained that she was “too old to be his grandmother.”

The Continental Mum tried hard to “fit in” but although an

ex-actress she belonged to a conventional generation and adaptability was not her strong suit. Everybody liked her and treated her politely, but it was impossible for the presence of an elderly lady not to create an atmosphere of constraint. For one thing, the adjective most in favour with the working and Bohemian classes could not be used in her presence, so conversation faltered. For another, she was continually mistaking somebody else's bedroom for hers in the rambling old house, and was apt to complain, "Verever I am going always I am opening a door and iss someone naked !"

It was a hot summer and obviously unwise to enter anybody's room without knocking; nevertheless even Brian sometimes forgot this. He was hoping to sell "Wardrobes" and one afternoon a rather superior couple, a major and his wife, turned up to look over the place. In the course of showing them round, Brian flung open a bedroom door: seated before the dressing-table was Miss Gingold, wearing little more than her one original piece of salvage from the blitz—a pair of false eyelashes—trying on a picture-hat that had been sent down from London. The major coughed, his wife blushed and Brian attempted a flustered explanation. "Oh, do come in," said Miss Gingold politely. Introductions followed. "Major and Mrs. er . . . er . . . Miss Hermione Gingold." "How do you do?" "How do you do?" Turning again to the dressing-table, Miss Gingold tried on the hat at a different angle. The prospective buyers made suitable comments on the room. "Charming, perfectly charming . . ." "... and a most delightful view." "The bed's divinely comfortable," Miss Gingold told them. With averted eyes the couple withdrew.

The remainder of the conducted tour round the "Wardrobes" bedrooms was, as far as I know, unmarked by any incident: even in that chaotic household, the late afternoon could be a quiet time. My collaborator and I were working downstairs on the script, the Continental Mum was at a neighbouring cottage, taking tea with Brian's sister Pat and her American companion, and the Russian ballet mistress was doubtless strolling round Princes Risborough and studying the local "peasants," in whose faces she professed to have discovered a wealth of "character." Her innocent interest in these people was a source of some embarrassment to us for, having learned who she was, a number of crones and gaffers, far more enterprising than they looked, pursued her with demands that they

be engaged to appear at the Savoy Theatre in "The Great Gates of Kieff"—and when any of us went into the "Pink and Lily" for a quiet drink some stage-struck codger would croak, "When is the foreign lady going to send me my contract?"

Mother, meanwhile, was having rather a bad time with her landlady who, for some reason, would not let her have a key—so that if Mother returned from a walk while the landlady and the other occupants were out, she simply had to wait until someone returned to admit her. This was, of course, rather trying but it did lead to a pleasant acquaintance with one of the more privileged lodgers who was in possession of a key.

This lady, also a refugee from the London blitz, was a fashionable milliner, renowned among her clients for the individual quality of her rich, hoarse, East End accent. One day when she and Mother were having tea with me at an *olde Englyshe* tea-shoppe run by Ladies, the fashionable milliner leaned towards me confidentially, "Tell me, Mr. Ackland," she said, "you get about the West End . . . what *are* these Nesbeens?"

Seeing Mother's little finger uncrook itself as her tea-cup, halfway to her lips, remained poised, I thought it more tactful to leave unsolved the mystery of these strangely-named beings.

The situation at "Wardrobes" grew trickier, the atmosphere more tense, as time went by. In collaboration with my friend I was churning out script ahead of schedule but Brian Hurst seemed to have lost interest in it: it worried us that he would not discuss the story with us and did not bother to read what we had written. The other guests were becoming increasingly impatient at not being able to "let their hair down" until the Continental Mum had retired for the night, and Brian's manservant went about in a permanent rage because of the calls on his time made by beer-inflamed peasants pounding on the front door and demanding their contracts for appearing at the Savoy Theatre.

The one beam of brightness in the Dostoevsky—an atmosphere was the Continental Mum's openly expressed admiration of and devotion to Hermione Gingold. This dated from the moment when she discovered that the English comedienne's parents came from Vienna. From now on "Toni" Gingold became, in the devoted lady's eyes, a "typical Viennese."

One night we were all sitting at dinner in Brian's elegantly furnished dining-room. Slender candles in gleaming Georgian

candlesticks cast a tender glow on the animated faces of Mr. Hurst's strangely assorted guests as his fuming manservant, stamping from one to another, banged down in front of them plates of spam and boiled potatoes. Overhead the Luftwaffe throb-throb-throbbed like a monstrous toothache.

In a pause in the conversation, the Continental Mum turned to Toni. "Oh, Miss Gingold!" she murmured, gazing with adoration at the typical Viennese. "You haf soch *beautiful eyes*!" Toni blinked them and smiled. A fresh wave of German planes roared and throbbed overhead. "And if you ever want to haf your face lifted," said the Continental Mum as an afterthought, "I can give you the address of a *vonderful* doctor in Berlin." Toni laughed as much as anybody else at the Continental Mum's extremely well-meant remark—and it was not a wry laugh, either, because she is not that sort of person.

"Ronald Atkins rides again..."

For a day or two afterwards Brian seemed able to forgive his elderly guest the constraint she inflicted quite unwittingly on life at "Wardrobes." But the end came eventually. What precipitated it, I can't recall—but I can see Brian striding up and down the room in which we worked saying, "It's no good, Rodney. I cannot go on like this—I can't *live* like this. I love the old girl, she's a darling—but how can I *work* with a respectable elderly lady in the house? She must *go*."

She went. That is to say, in a funereal atmosphere—with all the inhabitants of "Wardrobes" speaking in hushed voices and avoiding each other's eyes and even the manservant modifying his perpetual frown and moving with solemn, silent tread between the house and the hired car—the Continental Mum, clutching her caged budgerigar with one hand and her son's arm with the other, made an affecting exit from "Wardrobes." We watched her seat herself in the car, the birdcage on her lap, my colleague at her side. As they drove off to the station she gave a wan farewell out of the window and then turned pathetically to her son. London was their destination and the blitz was still on.

Brian paced the room. His expression was anguished. No-one spoke. The Irish director resembled a tempted monk struggling with his conscience. His sister Pat wore a similarly anguished ex-

pression. I was suddenly reminded of an old film poster advertising "SOULS IN TORMENT. DRAMA IN FIVE PARTS. FOR ADULTS ONLY. SPECIALLY AUGMENTED ORCHESTRA."

After several moments of frenzied pacing Brian came to a halt and fixed me with tortured eyes: "That pale, reproachful little face, Rodney . . ." he said in a shaking voice. "She shouldn't have looked out of the car window like that . . . it's not fair . . . I shan't be able to go through with it." The pacing and the soul-struggling were resumed. The Power of God won the battle. "Get hold of a bicycle!" Brian suddenly roared at me, pointing towards the front door with the sort of ham gesture he will never permit in his films. "Ride down to the station and bring her back! I cannot send that poor little woman into the hell of the London blitz to be murdered! And may God forgive me if you come back without her!" This was a real silent film climax, perfectly contrived.

I dashed out of the house, grabbed the first bicycle I could find—an antique lady's model with flat tyres—mounted it gingerly and wobbled away to the rescue of the Continental Mum. There was hurry-music in my ears as I pushed the pedals round, deliciously reminding me of the sheriff (without his posse) in the last reel of a Western, of Monte Blue as Danton flinging himself on to his horse to rescue Lillian from the guillotine in "Orphans of the Storm" and of a great many other film-heroes who jostled for pride of place in my mind.

Everything worked out in the best movie tradition. Careering down a hill and finding that the brakes didn't work, I could see the London train tearing like a mad thing towards the station. In a stunning montage I saw close-up flashes of the train wheels, the receding rails, the pathetic victim's face of the Continental Mum, long shots of myself straining every nerve and muscle as I pedalled like fury (a solitary, desperate figure in the landscape), a huge close-up shot of the C. M. showing trembling lips, and finally a shot from below ground-level of the engine steaming juggernaut-like into Princes Risborough station.

It *had*, in fact, just steamed in when I arrived. Finding myself without the necessary penny for a platform ticket and faced with a surly-looking collector at the barrier, I thought, "It's all very well, this introduction of last-minute obstacles to extract the ultimate degree of suspense from the situation—but it looks as though this is going to be one occasion when the hero of a last-minute rescue

arrives several seconds too late." I couldn't quite see myself remounting the lady's bicycle and, as the train puffed on its way, racing along beside the track snatching the Continental Mum through the carriage window from her journey to the Hell of London into a safe position on my handle-bars.

Luck, however, was with me. The sour-faced ticket-collector courteously waved me past the barrier, as if he knew I was a film-hero playing an important scene, and after a frantic search up and down the crowded platform I found my colleague and his mother at the exact moment when the whistles started blowing. I dragged the poor lady back from the compartment she was about to enter. It was the Nick of Time. The train steamed out, rounding off the episode. It was all curiously satisfying and gave me a pleasant sense of fulfilment. What I hadn't bargained for was the final fade-out scene.

"It's all right," I told the Continental Mum breathlessly. "Brian says you can come back." I looked at her reassuringly, imagining the irruption of film conventions into real life to be at an end. The one thing I should have remembered and the last thing that entered my mind as I gave her this cue was the Continental Mum's long and distinguished career in the continental theatre. Here was a Big Scene and here was an audience. That the audience consisted of a group of factory workers waiting for a local train, a few ex-farmhand recruits and a major or two welcomed or seen off by their stiff-upper-lip-conscious families made no difference.

With a cry of "You've saved me—you've saved me!" piercing enough to ensure that no-one on Princes Risborough station would miss a moment of what followed, down on her knees fell the Continental Mum. Claspings my hand in both hers—while I shuffled and muttered desperately, "I do assure you there's no need to——" she smothered it with kisses and tears, raising, occasionally, her swimming eyes to mine. With fiendish inspiration, as the unnatural silence which had fallen seemed to spread from the platform over the whole of Princes Risborough, she gave a great, theatrical sob and cried out in a broken voice, "Oh, my Goldy-boy, my Goldy-boy!"

Life at "Wardrobes" went uneasily on—but not for long. I was feeling horribly embarrassed, because the Continental Mum could not look at me without tears of gratitude to her rescuer filling her eyes and I could not look at *her* without painful recollections

bringing on an attack of "hot flushes." It was a depressing time for both my collaborator and myself, because Brian's lack of interest in the work upon which we were engaged was now painfully marked, remained unexplained and had led to his avoiding us. One day, when we could bear the awkward situation no longer, we both cornered Brian, whisked him into our workroom and demanded to know what was the matter. He stood before us in silence, mild-eyed and melancholy as any lotus-eater. "What has happened to you?" I said. "You look positively moonstruck." He stared at me in a startled way and asked in a voice of awe: "Rodney, why do you say that?" "Well, because you *do*," I said. He ran his hand over his brow and murmured dreamily, "Isn't that the strangest thing, now? That's more or less what I am—moonstruck." Hesitantly he gave us a simple explanation of this fey remark: Terence Young had brought him a story, "Dangerous Moonlight," and, because he felt it would make "a lovely fillum, really lovely," he could think of nothing else—but he had just not had the heart to tell us he was not going through with the picture we were scripting.

We were a little dashed but on thinking it over were glad we had forced Brian to speak—otherwise the gentle soul would probably have let us go on indefinitely, year after year, churning out reams of script which would never be used. We decided that, as Brian and Terence Young were to work together on the script of "Dangerous Moonlight," there was no point in our remaining at "Wardrobes." Accompanied by our respective and resigned Mums, we returned to London.

After a few weeks, Brian telephoned me: he was a little worried about the love scenes, to be played by Anton Walbrook and Sally Gray—would I come down and see if I could improve them. I was delighted to do so. The love scenes as presented to me seemed rather dull; Sally and Anton had nothing to do but be happy—and, as I argued with Brian and Terence, the happiness of two lovers can be an awful bore to everybody else unless it is, in some way, threatened. Let the audience feel that such happiness cannot last, that disaster is about to overtake the blissful, unsuspecting pair—and even the people in the seats behind may fall silent, in eager anticipation of the tragedy to come. Brian and Terence regarded me coldly, as if I had indecently exposed a sadistic streak. I was determined to make my point and cited "Camille" as an

example of what I meant—happiness must be menaced. As I talked I recalled Garbo's heart-rending gaiety in the early part of the film and tears came to my eyes. This so affected Brian and Terence that they hastily agreed I should re-write the love scenes my way.

I had another argument with them over Richard Addinsell's pastiche of Rachmaninoff, the now famous "Warsaw Concerto," which became one of the most popular features in "Dangerous Moonlight." How, I enquired, could it be a *concerto* when it had only one movement and lasted only five minutes? I was told it was only *called* a concerto, that the public prefer to have all pieces of music in films called concertos as the word sounds important and conveys to them the impression that a major musical work is given away with the picture. "What *was* it that used to be given away with a pound of tea?" I asked. Nobody knew, my flippancy was ill-regarded and I was assured that whatever the treat provided by tea-sellers for tea-drinkers, it could not possibly be compared with the treat in store for the film fans who would see "Dangerous Moonlight." Certainly the "Warsaw Concerto" was a hit; the public positively wallowed in it, one could scarcely walk down a street without hearing some desperate amateur fumblingly thumping out the great chords on some drawing-room piano, and the gramophone shops were besieged with demands for the record—mostly from ladies like two I encountered who listened to it, looking quite glazed with ecstasy, and cried, "Isn't it *wonderful*? So much better than Rachmaninoff!"

It seemed I was fated to make myself anything but popular over that picture. I remember Anton Walbrook was furious with me for saying I thought it horribly disillusioning that Paula Wessely, whom I'd adored for the warmth and humanity of her acting and who had appeared with him in "Maskerade," should now be making films for the Nazis. "She works because she must," he said angrily, defending his friend. "She is no Nazi but if she refused to appear in their films they could take from her everything she has, force her to work in a factory or send her to a concentration camp. As long as she is a star she can help others and I know that she has rescued many Jews: she has run great risks to save their lives, she has taken them over the frontier in her own car. It is disgraceful that anybody should speak against her."

"I'm most awfully sorry," I apologized. "I had no idea . . . but

I'm fascinated to hear all this about her—it means she is the sort of person I imagined her, after all. Tell me, does she ——” “I am trying to study these new love scenes,” said Mr. Walbrook coldly, “and I think they were infinitely better before people started tampering with them.” He walked away. I certainly sympathized with him for rising indignantly to the defence of a dear friend unjustly discussed, but : “Ill met by Dangerous Moonlight,” I said to myself ruefully. I was glad when my work on the picture was over and I could return to London where the bombs dropped by the Nazis would take my mind off the bricks dropped by myself.

IX

I ACT AGAIN—IN A BREAKNECK PRODUCTION

"Instead of a Waltzing Mouse..."

Back in London, I continued my propaganda-film chores—always hoping that a commercial offer would come along but determined now that when one did I would dig in my toes and refuse to write the script if I could not also direct the picture. I had, of course, forgotten that Fate could act just as unpredictably as Miss Bergner.

When Ted Black called me up and asked me to do a script for him about the Belgian underground movement and the production of a Free Belgian newspaper which was circulated by patriots under the incensed noses of the Nazis, I told him, rather grandly, that I would be happy to write it on condition that I should be the director. This, said Mr. Black, was very awkward: he had already chosen a director—Anthony Asquith. If my mind was made up, he supposed he would have to find another writer.

My mind *had* been made up but, feeling that I could not possibly reject a chance to work with so cinematically-minded a director even though it meant postponing for the moment my own ascension to the canvas-backed throne, I quickly unmade it and accepted Mr. Black's offer. Fate, I have no doubt, sat giggling behind the loom of the years.

I had met Asquith during my B.I.P. days: I admired his work and liked him so much as a person almost unique in being an intellectual as well as a film-director and yet having not a trace of malice or unkindness in his make-up that when he was cutting his picture "Dance, Pretty Lady"—a screen adaptation of Compton Mackenzie's "Carnival"—I stayed up all night with him in the cutting-room ardently discussing the Art of the Cinema. He probably found this rather a nuisance but did not show it.

I thought, "Dance, Pretty Lady" was pretty: it was cer-

tainly true to the Compton Mackenzie novel and Jennie Pearl, the heroine (played touchingly by Ann Casson) was duly murdered as the author had intended. It was "tried out on the dog" at a sneak pre-view at Hammersmith; at the climax, when Jennie's jealous brute of a husband approached the Cornish cliff-top from which he was to shoot her dead as she talked to her undergraduate lover on the beach below, the audience, to my astonishment, burst into roars of laughter. Apparently working-class audiences find the situation of a husband about to catch his wife with another man quite irresistibly risible. I should have been warned of this by my experience on tour as "Young Woodley." Anyway, the executive ordered Asquith to change the ending and, despite his protests and pleadings, he was forced to do this. Consequently, in the version shown to the public generally, although Flora Robson, as Jennie's mother, continued to utter dark prophecies that her daughter would come to a bad end, Jennie Pearl eventually married her undergraduate, to live happily ever after, and there was no point in the story at all.

I looked forward to working with Asquith on the Belgian film, "Uncensored," and in the course of writing it I evolved a little plan which, if successful, would give me the interesting experience of being directed by him. Eric Portman, by now much acclaimed for his performance in "49th Parallel" and much sought after, and Phyllis Calvert were to star as the leading patriots. There was to be a weak character, the brother of the Portman one, who, intimidated by the Nazis, miserably betrayed his nearest and presumably dearest—and as I had had such a success in warped and half-witted roles, I could see myself playing this pathetic monster most effectively. I actually wrote the part for myself but somehow I hesitated to ask Asquith or Ted Black if I could have it. I finished and delivered the script and while the picture was being cast I went about hugging to my heart the cheering thought that they would be hard put to it to find the right actor to portray the delinquent brother and must eventually come to me, as I had conceived the complex creature, for a suggestion: as I knew exactly how he should be played, I would modestly suggest myself.

The part was the last to be cast but nobody approached me for advice. Out of the blue, Peter Glenville, an old friend of mine at that time, telephoned me one day to say how delighted he was with the role of Portman's brother which he had just been given in

"Uncensored." He thought it was so well written. I swallowed the compliment, neat, and told him I had all along intended to play that part myself. I said I hoped he would understand and that it wouldn't spoil our friendship but I was going straight off to the Gainsborough studios to tell Ted Black and "Puffin" Asquith and the casting-director and anybody else concerned that I would be much better in the part than Peter Glenville and that they *must* have me. Peter wished me luck and off I went. I was told very civilly by all of them that they were very sorry but the role of Portman's brother had already been cast. I felt fed-up and frustrated; I had once again written a script without insisting on directing—and I had not had the good fortune to be directed by Anthony Asquith.

In the lull that followed this storm in a thimble, I met Brian Desmond Hurst whom I whisked into a bar for a drink over which to tell him of my frustrations and hear his news. Brian, it appeared, was about to make a film called "Alibi," in which Raymond Lovell would have the lead as a mysterious gentleman who did a mind-reading act in cabaret with the help of two sinister assistants, one male and one female. Brian had hoped to get Robert Helpmann to play the male assistant: "He looks just right for it," said Brian, "if you remember Bobby's own description of himself as a Japanese waltzing mouse"—but apparently Helpmann was either not free or not interested. Brian could think of no-one else who might satisfactorily represent this exotic rodent and neither could I. As we were talking, a young woman whom we knew came into the bar wearing a fez (or tarboosh, as I later learned to call it). Brian dreamily removed it from her head and put it on mine: he looked at me thoughtfully for a while, his head on one side, and then came out with "Rodney, *you* can play the assistant in a fez! Instead of a Japanese waltzing mouse we'll make him look like a malevolent Turk!" I accepted the part.

"Alibi" had been adapted by Rudi Cartier from a French film in which von Stroheim had played the leading role: that this was now to be taken by Raymond Lovell was another indication that the story was suffering a sea-change into something, if not rich, indubitably strange—for, excellent actor though Lovell was, he had nothing of von Stroheim's dynamic quality.

Edana Romney, who is now starring so successfully in television for Cartier, played Lovell's female assistant—and neither she, he

nor I ever really understood what it was we were supposed to be up to. I know I committed a number of murders, simply to save Ray Lovell the trouble, but I can't remember whether or not Edana was equally lethal and obliging. To keep ourselves amused, we invented a little drama of our own which we played, secretly, within the main drama; *our* story was something about a *menage à trois* and at least provided us with a legitimate reason for being alternately fond of or furious with each other.

The principal action took place in a Paris "boite," as big as the Albert Hall, where Margaret Lockwood was a "hostess," poor but respectable: it was her duty to entertain the male customers, of whom James Mason was one, and if she did lure them into buying her drinks she was doubtless, as Frances Day used to sing, "doing it all for Baby." To show what a hard life she led she wore clothes made by the best couturiers and lived in an attic full of exquisite Regency furniture.

The chief architectural feature of the production was a set of a dozen or so tall, twisted columns: these as a body or in twos and threes insinuated themselves into practically every scene—several of them turned up at a picnic, writhing upward from the green-sward in a revolted sort of way as if the very thought of the cucumber sandwiches at their feet had given them colic. These peculiar columns seemed to conceive an attachment for Brian—or maybe it was the other way round. When the production was over, they followed him about everywhere: they dominated his studio house in Kinnerton Street and I always imagined they were responsible for his quitting it—until I found a couple of them lurking in his present mews residence, wearing an "escape me never" expression quite as sinister as anything that went on in "Alibi."

Brian, possibly as baffled as the rest of us by the script, developed a tendency towards testiness. He made me re-play a scene with Ray several times, complaining impatiently: "No, no, Rodney. That's not right. I want you to look at him with *poached egg* eyes. Yours only look like gooseberries!" Maggie Lockwood had by now read "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" and *still* thought she would like to play the part: she was tartly reminded by Brian that she wasn't playing it in *this* picture. Edana had conceived the idea, which she has since tenaciously held, of portraying Rachel, the great French actress: as she was coming down the cabaret

staircase she was halted by Brian with, "Go back and do it again—and don't look as if you think you're Sarah Bernhardt doing a Rachel." James Mason, in a drunk scene, was told, "You're not Barrymore playing Barrymore!" He dutifully toned down his performance but when the American distributor's representatives saw the rushes they found it altogether too lifelike and, wagging their heads sagely, declared it "far too tough for American audiences." One must remember that this was long before "The Lost Weekend." Up went the twisted columns and the scene was re-shot—Mr. Mason now presenting a study in genteel inebriation to which even a member of a Temperance League could scarcely have taken exception.

The person who suffered most over this picture was a young actor called Peter Northcote who played a page at the boite. According to the script, I learnt that he had overheard Ray and myself plotting murder and decided that he must be eliminated; seizing a devil-sent opportunity, I pushed the luckless boy through a trapdoor in the flies. (Don't ask me what flies were doing in a mere cabaret: I haven't the faintest idea.)

Poor Peter had to fall past the camera, from a height of twenty feet on to a mattress below. I did not at all relish the idea of precipitating his fall: though playing a murderer I had no wish to commit manslaughter. Peter was not very happy, either: peering down through the trap he remarked that he knew just how Lucifer must have felt, which gave me an additional pang as I recalled that Lucifer fell "never to hope again" and Peter was a pleasant youth to whom nobody would wish anything so final to happen. We both knew we had to go through with the scene and Brian was impatient for us to get on with it. He gave the cue and I gave Peter rather a gingerly shove—and down he duly and gamely hurtled, landing shaken but unharmed on the mattress. "Phew!" he said, scrambling to his feet—while I stood aloft phewing with relief myself and thanking God *that* was over.

It wasn't over. Brian decided it did not look nearly dramatic enough. "We'll have to do it again," he said. "Again?" said Peter and I in chorus and tones of horror. "Yes," said Brian. "O.K.," said we in resigned tones. We were both as white as moonlight under our make-up. "All right, then. When I give the word..." said Brian.

We took up our positions. On the word I pushed Peter and

this time, unfortunately, he fell head first on to the mattress; he lay horribly still. "Oh, my God! I've killed him!" I thought. Fortunately Peter was not dead—but he *had* broken his neck. He spent six months in plaster and completely recovered from his gruesome experience: I imagine, though, that he wanted to forget it—at least, that is the one sound psychological reason I can think of for his changing his name. He went into hospital Peter Northcote and emerged Peter Cotes, who became the eminent theatrical producer and husband of Joan Miller, achieving fame with his presentation of the late Queen Mary's favourite play "Pick-up Girl."

Brian, much chastened, engaged Derek Blomfield to play the part of the page-boy, the fall was modified so that there was no risk of mishap—and ten days' re-shooting at twenty-five pounds a day proved an excellent palliative for my shattered nerves.

The director himself had no great opinion of "Alibi," looking upon it merely as a pot-boiler. One member of the cast, at least, seems to have shared that opinion, for James Mason, I am told, endeared himself to one of the women critics by writing to her: "Thank you so much for panning the picture; if people like you do not go on panning pictures like this, people like me will have to go on appearing in them." Nevertheless, for himself and Maggie Lockwood it was one more rung in the ladder to stardom, and was in any case a prolonged box-office success. When I went to America five years later, "Alibi" was still playing there and I was haunted on 42nd Street by the "poached egg eyes" I had made at Ray Lovell. The sight of my goggling self gave me no satisfaction—merely, remembering Peter, a fit of the shudders and a pain in the neck.

After "Alibi" I returned to the propaganda grindstone. I quite enjoyed writing "Mrs. Hitler's Lodger"—in which I smartly rebuked landladies for impeding the war effort and aiding the enemy by showing no consideration for their war-working lodgers—and "Rush Hour"—in which I sternly admonished leisured ladies to fly away home from their cinemas, hairdressers and tea shoppes either before or after the times when transport was needed by weary people more usefully occupied than they. Still, I must confess I was delighted when a finger beckoned me back to the commercial film industry.

I was asked by Isidor Goldsmith to write the script for a film of

A. J. Cronin's "Hatter's Castle." The prospect was so pleasing that the disillusion which followed was vile indeed. I was given a treatment already written by two eminent German refugees (whose names were to be used inconspicuously in the credits), and told I must work from that. As I went through this material I realized miserably that the job to which I had so looked forward would, in fact, be nothing but a chore. The Germans' treatment was, to my mind, a travesty of Cronin's story. I did my best to give the script a resemblance to the original but as some of the strongest dramatic situations had been omitted entirely and others radically altered—the Hatter and his son did *not* have an affair with the same woman, for instance—it was uphill and unrewarding work. I tried hard to establish the *tone* of the whole tragic story in the opening scene and was fairly sure that I had succeeded. Otherwise I was so dissatisfied with the thing that after I had finished and delivered it I did not go near the studios while it was being shot: though Robert Newton was playing the lead, I felt this was one film with which I wanted positively nothing to do.

A week before "Hatter's Castle" was to open at the Carlton I received a horrifying intimation that I *had* succeeded in making the first scene effective. The film company, I am told, had ruled that the second reel should be played first as the opening was "too gloomy." I telephoned the company and pleaded with them: "You can't do this," I said. "The opening scene is most important. It has to be sombre and ominous to give the audience a sense of foreboding—don't you see that?" "It would only depress people and we don't want any depression, do we?" said the voice on the telephone. "No. We'll play the second reel first." I could see it would be useless to argue.

I went to the première and, standing at the back of the stalls, fuming, I watched the second reel come on first. A glowering Bobbie Newton, heavily padded to give him bulk, loomed up on the screen: beneath his barrel-shaped body his slim legs had an absurdly incongruous elegance—they should have been walking down Bond Street, I felt. "Oh, Christ!" I moaned to myself. There was a tap on my shoulder. Bobbie was standing behind me "Come on!" he said, in a carrying whisper. "We don't want to watch this crap!" We withdrew to the "local" and talked of Cornwall.

I regretted afterwards that I had not stayed to see Deborah

Kerr's performance, which must have been remarkable as she was suddenly dubbed by the Press "The Blonde Hope of British Films." She is now, of course, the red-gold star of Hollywood and Broadway—which goes to show how careless the British film industry is.

X

ON THE FLOOR WITH SALLY ANN AND GRANGER

"A Dream Comes True..."

By 1943, I felt I was in a sufficiently strong position to make a definite stand and, snapping my fingers at Fate, I let it be widely known that I positively refused to write another script unless I could direct the film. Perhaps this show of spirit impressed the weaver: anyway, this time she elected to give me my heart's desire.

A British film company invited me to write a script of Donald MacArdle's "Thursday's Child" and agreed, though without a great deal of enthusiasm, that I should also undertake the direction. At last! I was to be a director. I saw myself seated on the coveted canvas throne, calm and authoritative, directing that work of genius which was to revolutionize film history. The English Tchekov would become Great Britain's (and Northern Ireland's) D. W. Griffith.

Nothing, of course, turned out quite as I had imagined. On my first day as director I walked on to the set, looking as dignified and cool as I could, with a cigarette between my fingers and a sheaf of papers under my arm. The "Head Sparks" (chief electrician), a union official, came up to me and bellowed, "Put out that cigarette!" I was so staggered I went red in the face, choked and, to hide my confusion, retired to my directorial office. After a little thought I decided I must immediately dispel the impression that I had been routed. I sent for Sparks and said to him: "Look—we're going to have to work together for three months. Let's make it amicable." "O.K." said he, off-handedly—and we returned to the floor together.

"Thursday's Child" was the story of an eleven-year-old school-girl: she had no desire to act but was cast to play the lead in a film and was made wretched by the falsity of studio life and by the

emotional upheavals in her suburban family—upheavals resulting from the family's least likely member earning more in a few weeks than any of them had earned in their lives.

We tested numerous actresses of ages ranging from seventeen to twenty-five in the hope of finding one who, with the help of a short gym-frock and an innocent expression, might conceivably be convincing as an eleven-year-old.

The only one I remember of those who did not get the part is Peggy Cummins.

She certainly looked young enough in the tests and she played her scenes more than competently—but it just wasn't possible to believe that any audience would accept her as a little girl who did *not* want to be a film star.

Even in 1943 Miss Cummins had complete assurance and certainly too much poise for the role in question: at any rate she appeared to have these qualities, though for all I know she may have been dying a thousand deaths from nerves.

Some years afterwards I saw Miss Cummins give a quite remarkable demonstration of that same poise and the self-possession that would have been so out of character in "Thursday's Child." It was in Gregory Ratoff's suite at the Dorchester. She had come to discuss the publicity for "My Daughter Joy," a picture directed by Mr. Ratoff, in which she had played the feminine lead opposite Edward G. Robinson. Gregory was raging about the room, giving, as he can, a beautiful performance of himself burlesquing a performance of himself. A waiter brought in a tray of tea and, attempting to dodge Gregory's flailing arms and the scripts and publicity sheets that this Russian-born director was temperamentally flinging about, dropped the entire contents of the tray into Miss Cummins' lap. Scalding tea soaked into and ruined her dress, fragments of cream cake stuck to her: without batting an eyelid she removed them, shook out her skirt, brushed off the tea-leaves with her hand, gave the waiter an understanding smile and continued with the conversation.

Sally Ann Howes was eventually cast for "Thursday's Child." She was exactly the right age for the part. She had never acted before and—though born of "theatrical" parents, Bobby Howes and pretty Pat Malone—she had, like the child she was to play, never even thought of acting. I don't know who it was that decided the little girl's Nanny should be present on the set to keep a careful

eye on her. In any case Nanny was certainly there. The only time she was not actually with her charge was when Sally Ann was in front of the camera : and even then, as I soon discovered, Nanny's influence on our small star was far stronger than mine, the producer's or anybody else's in the studio. Not a day passed without a moment arriving at which Sally Ann dried up and could not remember the next line. Every inducement, every persuasion was used but she just could not remember it. Work would come to a standstill. Hours were wasted—at some hundreds of pounds an hour. Sally Ann seemed to have a strange psychological quirk that made it impossible for her to remember certain lines. It was quite baffling. Helen Gosse, who had been engaged to coach the young actress in film technique, solved the mystery for me. It was no quirk—it was Nanny.

Helen overheard Nanny taking Sally Ann through her lines and whenever they came to something which by Nanny's standards might be considered rather too lower class for her charge, Nanny had exclaimed in a shocked tone, "Oh—a little *lady* wouldn't say that!" After this pronouncement from her Nanny, Sally Ann just couldn't bring herself to say it.

In spite of Nanny trouble, Sally Ann's performance was coming over in the rushes with great sensitivity, pathos and truth. Pliable and co-operative during rehearsals, at the same time she was determinedly obstinate about anything which she "had her own reasons" for not wanting to do.

Once I had spent the best part of an afternoon trying to help her into the right mood for a scene in which she had to cry herself to sleep : the tears would not come. At last, with only half an hour to go, I came to the reluctant conclusion that glycerine was called for. My leading lady knew nothing of such tricks and I had to explain to her : "You see, Sally Ann dear, we've only half an hour now and your tears don't seem to be coming properly to-day. So I think the best thing, as we've so little time, is to put these drops of glycerine on your eyelashes and . . ." Sally Ann cut me short. It was the only time she had ever lost her temper on the set. "I won't! I won't!" she cried with bitter indignation. "I absolutely *won't* have pretend tears!" She changed her tone. "Please, just let me try for a few more minutes and I *promise* to get real ones." She covered her face with her hands : a few minutes later she looked up, dropped her hands to her sides and said quietly,

"I've got them." Tears started running down her cheeks and we began shooting. When Bobby Howes saw the rushes of this scene he said, beaming with pride, as the lights went up: "Well, now I shan't have to worry about who's going to support me in my old age."

"A Star is Born..."

"Thursday's Child" had no love story. The male lead was played by Wilfrid Lawson: I was delighted to have this magnificent actor in the film, as the father of the child film star, though I was a little nervous of directing him as I realized his personality is exceptionally powerful. He had knocked "Bank Holiday" for six with a brief appearance as a stolid policeman eating a sandwich. At least it seemed to me that the scene entirely spoiled the rhythm of the film—but this may well have been because it had not existed in the original script and had been thought up and interpolated by Roger Burford. I was annoyed by it. Still, even I had to admit Lawson gave a gorgeous performance.

The secondary male role in "Thursday's Child" called for a young actor who could convey youthful idealism, sensitivity and a suggestion that he could be easily hurt. Several unsuccessful tests were made and after the delay they had caused we had to start shooting with the part still uncast. There was no time for further tests: we would have to take a chance on somebody. When John Argyll, the producer, told me one day that he had fixed an actor who was "not quite right for the part but should be reliable as he's done quite a lot of repertory work," I was thankful to know that at least the character had been cast. This conversation took place on the set and I hurried back to an interrupted camera-rehearsal without asking the actor's name. It turned out to be Stewart Granger.

He was far from ideally cast and he knew it, but we were pleased that he seemed to be a co-operative chap who would do his best and take direction without argument. He was as modest as a beginner should be. He was certainly tall and handsome. Perhaps that is why he was generally resented.

The moment he came on the set for the first day's shooting, Granger, without being in any way rude or aggressive but through some extraordinary quality for which he has since become famous, succeeded in putting everybody's back up. I have never known

another actor to inspire such unanimous antagonism—yet he was perfectly easy to work with and, as far as I saw, never did anything specific that one could accept as a reasonable cause for dislike.

He made his name in "The Man in Grey," his next picture after "Thursday's Child," and has never looked back.

The attitude of the technicians reminds one of a story which once went the studio rounds. It appears that a male star had been complaining to an actress on the set that a painful boil made it difficult for him to play his love scenes. When he went off to his dressing-room, the actress remained pensive, obviously worried about the poor fellow's affliction. One of the electricians sidled up to her. "Don't you worry, Miss," he said. "*He's* all right. That's not a boil—that's just his conceit busting out of the back of his neck!"

The reactions of the women studio workers to Stewart Granger could not, needless to say, have been more different from the men's. It was quite apparent that the good old primitive female instincts linger on in the modern girl.

During the first day's shooting for Granger, the script called for him to make his way across a room where a party was going on and join Eileen Bennett, who was playing Sally Ann's sister, at the window. Because of the circumstances leading up to this meeting, the actor was required to appear a little hesitant, even rather shy. There was no suggestion of sex rearing its head at this point of the script—but when the rushes were shown next day the presence of sex could not be ignored. As Stewart Granger, his back to the camera, bore down on the girl, there was something about him that suggested he was not only going to make a pass at her but, without wasting time, would grab her and carry her forcibly upstairs. I am quite sure Mr. Granger had no intention of conveying this impression but it was undoubtedly conveyed and I sat dismayed.

"He's wrong—he's wrong—he's *wrong*!" I was saying to myself as the lights went up. I looked anxiously round at the other people in the theatre. Flora and Phil, the film editor and her assistant, and the continuity girl and several other females attached to the unit were all behaving like mediums coming out of trances. After a moment or two of dazed silence there was among them the most astounding outbreak of mooring and moaning: "Oooh! . . . Isn't that man *marvellous*?" "Oooh! . . . His voice! Did you notice his *voice*!" "Oooh! . . . The way he walked across the

room!" "I know! Oooh! . . . It made me feel all funny down my spine!"

I stared at the swooning girls in amazement—and so did the men from the projection room, whose comments ran: "Lumme! What's marvellous about *him*?" "Search me! That voice . . . I can't stand it!" "No. It's a real plummy *actor's* voice." "And he's not supposed to be going to *seduce* Eileen but he looks as if he's made up his mind to." "He's all wrong for the part."

These disparaging remarks angered the girls: in a matter of seconds all masculine comment was drowned in a flood of passionate protest and a further upsurge of hysterical rapture from Stewart Granger's first film fans.

"In The Good Old Summertime"

In every film there is invariably one scene which turns out to be unexpectedly difficult to shoot. The difficulties we had in shooting a garden party scene for "Thursday's Child" were more unexpected than most. It seemed a good idea, for reasons of economy, to get permission from the owner of a small back-garden to shoot the garden party sequences on his back lawn, rather than build a studio set. The most suitable garden we could find was attached to a suburban villa. The owner, having had our assurance that we would not trample on the flower-beds, said we could come and film there when we wished. We were all very happy about it. All we needed now was one fine day.

Two wet days followed. The third dawned more hopefully and the weather report definitely promised sunshine in the afternoon. Cameras and equipment were taken to the garden and set up and during the morning, which was warm but overcast, the actors, in make-up and costume, rehearsed the scene we were to shoot.

At about half-past two, the sun came out. So, from the house, did an elderly, choleric gentleman lugging a deck-chair. He pushed through the groups of people on the lawn, set up his chair well within camera-range, lowered himself into it and glared about him with an expression that was both smug and defiant. We stared at the apparition in complete bewilderment.

"What does the old geezer think he's up to?" one of the technicians said to me. "You'll have to deal with him."

I pulled myself together and went over to the stranger. "I'm



"A WRAITH-LIKE APPEARANCE ON THE SET"
 R. Ackland, Mrs. Lodge, Carol Reed and John Lodge
 (the Lodges of Boston)



"WHY SHOULDN'T I PLAY TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES?"
 Margaret Lockwood with Hugh Williams in "Bank Holiday"



"WE DON'T WANT TO WATCH THIS—"
Emlyn Williams, Robert Newton and Henry Oscar in "Hatter's Castle"



"I WON'T HAVE PRETEND TEARS!"
Sally Ann Howes in "Thursday's Child"

Rodney Ackland," I said, "and I am directing a film and we have been given permission to shoot a garden party scene here. As you can see, we're all set to shoot, so I wonder if you would mind . . ."

The gentleman cut me off sharply. "I don't care who you are or what you are or why you're here. I'm Mr." (perhaps we had better call him) "X and my niece, Miss X, has the ground floor back with use of garden. I'm visiting her so I have the use of the garden and I'm not going to be deprived of it by a lot of—'theatricals.'"

"But . . ." I began, frantically.

"There are no buts about it," snapped Mr. X—and shut his eyes so positively he might just as well have turned his back on me.

I went to find the householder to see if he could prevail upon Mr. X to take his afternoon nap elsewhere. The householder was out. Miss X was not at home either. I returned in despair.

A member of the camera crew suggested we should use one of the reflectors as a burning-glass and take the skin off Mr. X's nose. "Don't do it, Guv.," warned an electrician earnestly. "Don't you touch him. That's all he's waiting for—assault!—then he can sue you. I know his sort!"

I approached Mr. X again and spoke to him feelingly—explaining that every wasted minute was costing the studio hundreds of pounds. He ignored me completely. Eileen Bennett, looking very appealing, pleaded with him prettily. He did not even open his eyes.

We tried to rearrange the garden party grouping so that we could avoid Mr. X and shoot just one part of the garden but found it would look miserably cramped. Mr. X, with fiendish cunning, had taken up a strategic position from which to be obstructive.

We fumed helplessly. If Mr. X continued to sit there we would have to abandon all hope of doing the scene. Already a precious hour and a half had been lost. Suddenly Wilfrid Lawson, who had whiled away the time snoozing under a tree, took an active interest in the problem—and it was he who succeeded in routing Mr. X.

Wilfrid walked over to Mr. X's chair and stood looking down at the obstructionist. Then he called out to the cameraman, "Who's this? Does he live here?"

The cameraman shouted back: "Says he's Mr. X. No, he doesn't live here—it's his niece."

Wilfrid looked up at the sky and said loudly to nobody in particular, "Doesn't wear any drawers." Mr. X's eyes snapped open. "What did you say?" he roared furiously. Wilfrid bent over him, winked and said in a confidential, man to man tone of voice, "Doesn't wear any drawers." Mr. X struggled up from his chair, purple in the face with rage. "How dare you? How *dare* you?" he bellowed. Wilfrid gave him a jovial leer and said, teasingly, "You mean, how do I *know*?" We thought, we even hoped, Mr. X would explode. "You . . . you scoundrel!" he spluttered. "I shall call my solicitor!" Wilfrid wagged his head: "Do you think he'll be able to do anything about it—you know how they are," he said sympathetically, clearly implying that girls will be girls despite the advice of solicitors. "I'll call my solicitor *now*! I'll sue you for this!" roared Mr. X at the top of his voice—and stamped off into the house, followed by shouts of derisive laughter. The electrician had been right—Mr. X was obviously the suing sort. He must, however, have realized, or perhaps his solicitor realized, that he had no case—for Wilfrid Lawson could easily have claimed that he was speaking of some lady unknown to Mr. X: he had not mentioned, had never met and knew nothing about Mr. X's niece. We never saw Mr. X again—nor did we ever hear from him.

Recovering from our laughter we immediately got busy on a quick run through of the scene we had been waiting to do. Two minutes later the sun vanished behind a grim veil of cloud. We could not afford to spend another day on this one scene so, to my bitter disappointment, I was forced to shoot it under a grey sky. I had wanted it all to look bright and gay but had to console myself with the thought that it probably looked more realistic the way it was: we are in this country accustomed to grey skies for garden parties and the patter of raindrops on Ascot hats.

"Go Out and Stay Out!"

"Thursday's Child" was made on a shoe-string budget of £28,000 at a time when the usual cost of an unambitious film was £40,000. "Strict economy" was the watchword: it was also the death sentence as far as one sequence was concerned.

Halfway through the story I had planned to use what is known as a montage sequence: in this case it was to give an impressionistic

suggestion of Sally Ann's life during the making of the film within the film. Like most montage sequences, this one was composed of a number of shots and flashes dissolving from one to another and sometimes occupying the screen at the same time. When it arrived back from the laboratories in what was supposed to be its finished state, several shots were missing. The result was utter confusion.

I tackled the editor with it. "Flora, what on earth's happened to the montage?"

"Well, I'm terribly sorry but I forgot to send some of the shots in," she replied.

I was in a rage. "But it *can't* go into the picture like this—it looks *frightful*!"

"I know," said Flora dolcely, "but I don't see what we can do—it's printed now."

Flora was right: nothing could now be done. It would not have cost more than fifty pounds to have the montage re-processed to include the missing shots: the company refused to spend another penny on the picture. The montage would have to be used as it was. Ronnie Anscombe, the cameraman on this sequence, protested that it was more than his reputation was worth to allow it to be shown in this condition and naturally I felt that, as the montage seemed to me no more than a meaningless muddle, it would prejudice my chances of future success as a director. We were so sincere about this, we offered to pay for the re-processing out of our own pockets. The company said "No" with a firmness and finality which showed they intended to waste no more time in argument: there was about their attitude a displeasing implication that it couldn't possibly matter in the least *what* went into the film. I had an uneasy premonition that they regarded "Thursday's Child" as still-born and would bury it somewhere in the vaults, to moulder away unseen. Things did not turn out quite as badly as that, though, so I mustn't be unfair.

It was a satire on the less attractive aspects of the film industry. It had no love interest to speak of and an ending that showed the complete and irreparable disruption of a family. Was it not really rather astounding that such a subject should ever have been accepted? It was scarcely the sort of thing that would automatically appeal to a distributor—and, though this may not be generally known, in the film business the distributor is virtually the man who, with the exhibitor, can determine whether or not a film shall

be made. If the distributor (who, like the exhibitor, contributes nothing to the making of a film but merely receives a substantial cut of its takings) says of some projected subject: "With that story and that cast, it'll never take a penny at the box-office"—the studios are usually willing to abandon the subject. It was quite a mystery how mine had got by.

After the trade show (a function at which exhibitors view films through a fog of cigar smoke), I was told that "Thursday's Child" would neither be given a West End première nor shown to the Press. I went to see the distributing company's senior executive. "I hear you don't like my picture," I ventured. "What do you mean—I don't like it?" he said in a surprised voice, raising in me hopes that were instantly dashed as he continued: "It's not a case of I don't like it. NOBODY likes it!" I withdrew, crushed.

Despite the blow I had received, I was still convinced that "Thursday's Child" had *something*: it had, for instance, a story in which there was no pandering to conventions—and it had Sally Ann's moving performance. The fact that it also had Stewart Granger was one that, in those days, didn't seem very important.

When I told my mother that the company were not even going to give a Press show for "Thursday's Child," she said how *dare* they behave like that to me and instead of getting upset about it, what I ought to do was give a Press show myself. It was the sort of idea that would only occur to Mother or Eric von Stroheim—it had not occurred to me, but the more I thought about it the better it seemed. I should, of course, have to ask the company's permission, which they might well refuse: still, it was worth a try.

The try came off. The company, with a bored air of "you're just asking for trouble—on your own head be it," said I might give a Press show providing I bore the expenses.

My secretary sent out invitations to the film critics and I hired a projection room. I was as nervous as a cat. Supposing the critics didn't bother to come? To my delight most of them did—and their reviews were unanimously favourable and some even enthusiastic. The late Richard Winnington, universally respected as a most sincere and forthright critic, headlined his *News-Chronicle* article, "The Answer to Mrs. Miniver." Here, he said, were English life and lower-middle-class English people shown truthfully on the screen at last. "Thursday's Child," he wrote, was a lesson for the British film industry. The film industry learnt its

lesson and closed the door on me once again.

Some time afterwards I was in conversation with one of the film company's high-ups, and I couldn't refrain from asking him, "What did the distribution boys say when they'd read the notices of 'Thursday's Child'?" "Well," he replied, "they said you must have paid for them." The critics, I felt sure, would have torn these cynical gentlemen limb from limb had I told them of this charming supposition but I held my tongue because, after all, I did want to get back into the film industry. It took me two years to do so.

XI

OLYMPUS AND THE ELYSIAN FIELD

"The Higher, The Fewer..."

I continued to make five-minute propaganda pieces for the M.O.I., but as far as the companies making feature films went, a dark cloud seemed to have descended on me, blotting myself and my work in the cinema from view and from memory. As the months passed, my film ambitions and my bank balance became so deflated that I would have grasped at the offer of writing additional dialogue for an "Old Mother Riley" picture. No such offer came. Nevertheless, I found myself during this period transported into the empyrean, the upper reaches, the Olympus of British film production: I was continually being invited to parties at Claridges given by Mr. del Guidice, the big shot of Two Cities.

Just before the war, a play of mine had been given a couple of Sunday performances at the Globe Theatre. Del Guidice had read the published version and conceived the idea that he would present it with his most favoured contract-star, Greta Gynt, in the leading part. For years I had tried to get past the Italian producer's secretaries, managers, right-hand men and left-hand women in order to persuade him to let me make a film on the life of Elizabeth Fry: now when I telephoned I was put straight through to him, I was bowed right into his sitting-room whenever I called, and I was repeatedly bidden to small parties at which he discussed with me plans for presenting the play at Drury Lane—if the Albert Hall were not available. In the circumstances, I just could not bring myself to tell him that I thought Miss Gynt would be completely wrong in the part of the too compassionate heroine and that I could only see her in the very different comedy role of the heroine's friend. Mr. del Guidice was, after all, then the most acclaimed film producer in England—Korda having taken off for the United States where the purpose of his visit was so misunderstood that a leading "show business" paper over there reported he was sitting

in on conferences on how to combat the menace of British films. Having the entrée to Mr. del Guidice's Claridges suite was gratifying while it lasted. It did not last long.

One morning to my horror I received a letter from the producer of *The Questors*, an amateur dramatic society at Ealing, announcing a production of the play in which del Guidice wanted to present Miss Gynt: it was being presented for a week. I went nervously to the opening night, expecting to find a vicar's lady and a colonel's widow interpreting my heroine and her confidante with their eyes fixed firmly on the floor throughout, in self-conscious modesty at having so many people looking at them. Instead, I saw what seemed to me a moving and beautiful production. In the second interval, I hurried to the nearest telephone box and asked del Guidice to bring Miss Gynt to see the play with me as soon as he possibly could. Everything was arranged for the following night.

What I had in mind was to say to both of them, after they had seen the performance, "Well, now you've seen it, don't you think the heroine's friend is a much better part than the heroine's? Greta would be *wonderful* as the friend—there's so much more *variety* in the part, she would have so much more opportunity to display her talents—and it would be better for the *play*, too..." As neither Mr. del Guidice nor Miss Gynt made the slightest reference to the play on the way home from Ealing, I had no opportunity to deliver my piece of Machiavellian dialogue—and I have never seen or heard from them from that day to this.

At one of the del Guidice parties I had met Gabriel Pascal, the hirsute little Hungarian, as broad as he is long, who had achieved an eminent position in the cinema by acquiring the film rights of all Bernard Shaw's plays for half-a-crown. After the debacle with Miss Gynt, I ran into him again at another party—I was really getting around now, as a result of being seen at Claridges—and found myself the fascinated eavesdropper to a conversation in which Pascal was trying to persuade James Mason to play Apollodorus in the film of "*Caesar and Cleopatra*." Mason seemed to be toying with the idea: his wife, Pamela, suddenly appeared beside him and, finding what he was up to, turned on Gabby with the ferocity of a Siamese cat defending its young and said, "I don't know why you think *James Mason* would accept a role where he'd appear only in long shots!"

"Ah, my dear," Gabby replied, "you do not understand how I make films. In *my* films I do not *have* long shots."

This remark stunned me : it was as if a pianist had claimed that when *he* played he never used the black notes. On recovering consciousness, I saw the Masons had departed and heard Pascal saying to me, "My friend, I want you to write me an original film story for Sid Field which will be for British pictures what 'La Femme du Boulanger' is for French, and will prove that Sid is the British Raimu."

"I think that would be a *wonderful* idea!" I replied with enthusiasm. "Really, what a *wonderful* idea! I haven't actually *seen* Sid Field or 'La Femme du Boulanger,' as a matter of fact—but I've read the reviews on both of them and I do think this is an absolutely magnificent idea."

The truth was that the magnificent idea, to my mind, was that I should get a script to write for the sort of money Pascal paid—and might, if I fought hard enough, possibly be allowed to direct it. I did not, however, quite see myself as the British Marcel Pagnol. Pagnol was the writer-producer and sometimes director of a series of regional films, set in the Midi, of which "Femme du Boulanger" was perhaps the most famous, and I disliked his work intensely. I could not forgive or forget an interview in which, speaking as a dramatist, he had once openly expressed his contempt for the Art of the Cinema : his only reason for becoming a film producer, he had said, was to ensure that his dialogue would be heard by as many people as possible.

My lack of French may have added to the jaundiced view I still hold of Pagnol pictures—and the fact that I suffered three and a half hours of his "Angele" at a French flea-pit where the reels kept breaking down and an Indian fakir had to be brought on to mollify the audience during repairs, may well have helped to lower even further my opinion of his "art" and to persuade me that his "technique" was, to put it mildly, limited. Fundamentally, I dare say, the reason for my prejudice against him is that I resent the monstrous affront he put upon my beloved cinema, the celluloid mistress : as, in my view, he was barely on nodding terms of acquaintance with her and understood nothing of her mysteries and magic—the action in his films being restricted to talking without walking and walking without talking—he had no call to speak disparagingly of her. The fact that he was obviously infatu-

ated with my second love, the theatre, was no excuse.

Mr. Pascal thought that my not having seen Sid Field or "La Femme du Boulanger" could easily be remedied. "Get yourself a seat at the Prince of Wales where Sid is playing," he ordered, "and have the film run through for you somewhere and meet me for lunch at Claridges next Wednesday."

At great expense I got myself a seat to see Sid Field and at even greater expense booked a projection room and had the film run through. Field's genius naturally enchanted me and I detested "La Femme du Boulanger" even more than I thought I would. Completing the schedule, I arrived at Claridges on Wednesday to lunch with Mr. Pascal. Mr. Pascal was not there—he was at the studios, I was told, and would not be back until the evening. Next morning I telephoned him. He asked me to lunch at Claridges the following Wednesday.

The following Wednesday I again presented myself at Claridges to lunch with Mr. Pascal. It appeared that he was already lunching. Entering the restaurant, I was escorted towards a table where I was disconcerted to see him surrounded by a motley—not to say fearsome—crew: among them, to my great relief, I espied a friend, Brian Desmond Hurst.

As I approached the group, Pascal saw me. The others saw me. Faces fell, panicked whisperings ensued and, feeling that either I looked like "The Phantom of the Opera" or my flies were undone, I came to an embarrassed halt. Not a little embarrassed herself, Marjorie Deans, Pascal's continuity girl and admirer (she later wrote a book about the making of "Caesar and Cleopatra," treating the film as though it were a masterpiece), detached herself from the Pascal party and, heading me off from it with a pained expression, delivered her message: "Mr. Pascal can't see you now—he's lunching with *Korda*," her voice dropped to a whisper as she named that name. "He's just back from America, you know, and it's *frightfully* important. Mr. Pascal said would you wait outside."

Uncertain as to whether she meant outside the restaurant or outside Claridges, I decided, the day being cold—though not actually snowing—that it would be as well to put on my overcoat. I was entering the gents' cloakroom to retrieve it when from behind me came an urgent cry: "Rodney! Rodney!" I turned to see Marjorie Deans galloping from the restaurant in pursuit. She was

no longer behaving like a rather nervous minister at some calamity-threatened court, or as if her boss, impulsive as any Roman or Zulu emperor, might in a tantrum have the whole of his retinue decapitated and their heads stuck on posts at the entrance to Denham Studios; she was her friendly, forthright self. "For God's sake, don't be offended by Gabby," she said. "You know what he is, but he really has some awfully important business to discuss with Korda." She took my arm and led me towards an armchair in the foyer: "Now, sit down here and have a drink—order yourself a large one—and Brian will come out and talk to you." I sat down, ordered myself a drink—a large one—and Brian came out and talked to me. We talked about Gabriel Pascal.

An hour or so later, our conversation was brought to an uncomfortable halt in mid-sentence. Heralded by the Claridges quintet playing what in a film would have been taken for Gabby's theme-music, "There'll always be an England," the dumpy figure of the dashing ex-cavalry officer from Hungary waddled up to us. His face, portentous and pixie-ish with God knows what mischief-in-store for the British film industry, loomed rapidly into close shot behind a large cigar—giving me a brief impression of a balloon towed by a 1914 Zeppelin, both of them about to burst into flames.

Dismissing this disrespectful thought I proceeded, as soon as greetings had been exchanged, to say my piece about how I had carried out Mr. Pascal's instructions to the letter. "Well, I managed to get in to see Sid Field," I told him, "and I see exactly what you mean about his being the English Raimu; and I hired a theatre and managed to find a copy of 'La Femme du Boulanger' and had it run through for me." Abandoning my strict regard for truth, as even Matilda's Aunt might have done had she been as eager as I to please, I went hurriedly on: "Of course, you're absolutely right! What an enchanting picture! It would make an ideal vehicle for Field. Transposed into an English background, it's exactly the sort of subject I've had an *urge* to write for a long time." I sat back, reminding myself of an extraordinary moment when, at the age of seven, I had been chosen as "the best boy in the form." But there were no pats on the head forthcoming from Mr. Pascal.

"I cannot discuss this now," he said. "I am discussing 'Caesar and Cleopatra' with Brian. Come up to my sitting-room, Brian." He started to move away, the Zeppelin-cigar swerving and towing

him in the direction of the lift. As I rose, he called to me over his shoulder: "Come to lunch with me here next Wednesday at one o'clock." Next Wednesday, at one o'clock, I went there to lunch with him. "Reception" informed me that Mr. Pascal was not at the hotel and was not expected until late that evening: he had left no message for me but I could, if I cared to, leave one for him. I didn't care to.

A great many months later, when Denham Studios were rocking with the production of "*Caesar and Cleopatra*," I met Pascal again. It was in the long Denham corridor and behind Gabby streamed a great procession of feathered head-dresses, giving the impression that the Hungarian producer was making his entrance in a scena at the Folies Bergere. Finding himself face to face with me, Pascal halted. There was a brief pause before his face opened up in an expansive smile and his arms opened in an expansive gesture. "But my dear!" he said—and, the smile fading, he hung his head, widening his eyes in a look of affectionate reproach: "*Where* is the script for Sid Field that you were going to write for me?"

Like jesting Pilate, he would not stay for an answer: the plummy procession surged between us and, when it had gone, so had Mr. Pascal.

I learned later that this procession was under the direction of Oliver Messel: he had had some difference with the producer and, as everybody else did at some time or another, felt he could not go on working with him. The elegant be-feathered head-dresses and colourful costumes he had created were being borne out to waiting cars to be whisked back by Oliver to his own studio in London.

I was not at Denham because the studio doors had reopened to me—I was still under the cloud of "*Thursday's Child*"—but I used sometimes to visit the studios, to watch "*Caesar*" being shot, at the invitation of Arthur Boys, who was working with Oliver Messel on the sets and costumes.

Arthur introduced me to Claude Rains, who was playing Caesar, and from the moment Rains and I discovered we were "old boys" of the same Council School in Parsons Green we became chums. So obsessed was the English actor with resentment of Pascal that it was almost impossible to get him on to any other subject. Sitting in a corner of the set during the hours-long waits between takes, he kept on and on about what Gabby had been up to that day or

the day before, like a man jabbing away at a terribly aching tooth. It was only by reminiscing myself that I could lure him into reminiscence and one small swapping of stories went a long way to cementing our friendship.

I told Rains how, when I was terribly hard up at the age of fifteen, I contrived to go from Parsons Green to the West End and do the round of theatrical agents and return for fivepence: I used to walk down the stairs at Piccadilly tube station on my way back (it was before the days of escalators) and up the stairs at South Kensington where I boarded a bus and either looked fixedly out of the window when the conductor came round or engaged him in a long and confusing argument from which he gathered, as the bus neared Parsons Green, that what I had really wanted was a bus in the opposite direction.

There is a well-known theatrical anecdote about an actor who, reaching the limit of exasperation at the stupidity of his producer, turned on him at last: "Look here, Mr. So-and-so," he is supposed to have threatened, "you'd better watch yourself because if you're not *very* careful I shall play this scene exactly as you want me to." Recalling this story during a muttered hate session between takes one morning, Claud decided that, as it had probably never been heard in Hungary, he would try it out on Pascal as an original remark that afternoon, in the hope that it would give him some slight relief from the permanent toothache of being directed by Gabby.

It wasn't long before Gabby gave him the cue. Claud rose, in the full majesty of his imperial robes (though as there were dainty gathers in Caesar's toga to stop it falling over his arm at the wrong moment, he always suggested to me a rather angry society hostess) and standing by his throne addressed the producer: "Mr. Pascal," he said, with a clear and even enunciation, "you'd better watch your step—because if you're not *very* careful I shall play this scene exactly the way you want me to."

A ripple of rapture went round the studio as Claud resumed his seat upon the throne and played the scene to his own satisfaction without further comment from Pascal. The old theatrical anecdote was reborn and, its origins forgotten, is now chucklingly repeated as "what Claude Rains said to Gabriel Pascal."

Towards the end of the same day, Gabby was directing a scene of Cleopatra's handmaidens gossiping by a swimming pool while, in the background, a pretty girl of sixteen named Jean Simmons was

running her fingers over a harp. The handmaidens had to skitter about, screaming and tittering in the way that, for some odd reason, producers seem to imagine young women scream and titter when safe from masculine eyes. Having got through this nonsense to Gabby's satisfaction, they settled down to Shaw's dialogue. Renee Ascherson, the clear-cut, finely intelligent young actress who had given such an exquisite performance opposite Olivier in "Henry V," was Charmian and had the most important dialogue in the scene. She played it to perfection—but it wasn't Gabby's idea of perfection. He rehearsed her again, again and again, until the poor girl was too tired to know what she was saying or doing and what had been perfect was reduced to a complete mess. "Very well, my dear!" Gabby shouted to her at last. "If you cannot understand how to play the scene I will *show* you how to play it!"

Everyone stood aghast; electricians and stage hands craned from the topmost dim recesses of the studio to watch Mr. Pascal, omitting not a single titter and screaming every girlish scream, play the part of Charmian "as it should be played." When he had finished there was a hush—and then a great shout of uncontrollable laughter burst from every throat on, above and around the "Caesar and Cleopatra" set.

"That is the end of the work for to-day!" bawled Pascal above the uproar. He stumped out, glowering, and work for the day ended although it was not yet five o'clock. When, many months later, the film had its London première, Renee Ascherson's name did not appear on the screen.

Little Jean Simmons, it was rumoured on the set, was "the great new discovery" and this description was later justified, though not in "Caesar and Cleopatra." She appeared at the time to be no more than a plump, jolly schoolgirl—and she seemed, then, to have no more than a schoolgirl "crush" on Stewart Granger, the handsome, bronzed Apollodorus, but as she has since married him it was obviously something rather more enduring than that. Granger treated her as "a nice kid" and showed a fatherly interest in her. Watching Gabby, who made a pet of starry-eyed Jean, stroking her hair and patting her cheeks with his stubby hands, Granger boiled with rage: "That revolting old so-and-so," he ground out, gritting his fine white teeth, "look at him! It's disgusting! How dare he! She's only a child! It makes me sick to see him lay a finger on her!"

He was so furious with Pascal that it was generally assumed on the set that it was "Jimmy" Granger who incited a camel to bite the director.

When "Caesar and Cleopatra" was eventually shown to the Press, they found little to admire in the million pound "spectacle" Pascal had tried to make out of Shaw's intimate comedy-of-character which, I believe, was written as an antidote to the super-spectacles Beerbohm Tree was making of Shakespeare's plays before the 1914 War. More money was spent on "Caesar" than on any other British film—and spent to so little purpose that there was no hope of takings equalling expenditure and a profit was utterly out of the question. I have no doubt, personally, that this monstrous "folly" was largely responsible for the crippling financial crisis which later hit the British film industry.

I always thought this particular play a curious choice of subject for the most costly of British films to be made in British film studios during the war against Fascism; Mussolini had declared it to be his favourite play—and small wonder, considering the scene in which Cleopatra, carrying out Caesar's instructions on how to be a queen, chases one of her Nubian slaves round the room with a whip. Perhaps, though, one should not attach too much significance to Dictators' choice of favourite movies: before the war, Hitler's self-confessed choice was "Cavalcade."

A year or two after the general release of "Caesar and Cleopatra," when I was in America, I came across a prize example of the methods used by ruthless exhibitors to persuade a reluctant public into their cinemas. Browsing among the stills outside the numerous rival houses on 42nd Street, in 1947, I was arrested by an advertisement that ran "SEE the lust-mad Romans! SEE the most fabulous siren of the ages ensnaring a Dictator in the Meshes of Desire! SEE the great battle scenes! SEE the Fall of an Empire! SEE the fabulous orgies of ancient Rome!" Voluptuously reclining across the whole width of the cinema's entrance was a cut-out female figure, revoltingly coloured in shades of "municipal pink," purple, red and yellow—the highlights of its lips looking like projecting teeth. Surveying this bulbous-breasted houri with her pearl-encrusted thighs, I concluded hopefully that this must be a revival of an old Theda Bara epic. I found, on investigation, that the fairground figure above my head was meant to represent Lady Olivier as Shaw's schoolgirl Cleopatra—and that the lust-mad

Romans and fabulous orgies were to be seen, apparently, in that intimate little comedy by G. B. S., in which he depicts the Serpent of Old Nile as a sexless kitten and Julius Caesar (that historical figure who, in addition to his more publicized amours, once, dressed as a lady, went through a ceremony of marriage with a good-looking centurion) as a world-weary pedagogue with all passion spent.

Anyone lured into "C. and C." by the advertisement would, I thought, feel rather as the patrons of a "blue" cinema in Port Said would do if, having paid their money, they were presented with a movie of "Quality Street" or "Lavender and Old Lace." Nobody, however, seemed to be falling for the exhibitor's nonsense: they were all flocking to a double programme of "The Bride of Frankenstein" and "Dracula's Daughter" on the other side of the street and to James Mason in "Alibi" at the cinema next door. Even the fact that Gabby had taken his Sphinx and his own sand to Egypt when shooting the film, because he considered the genuine articles insufficiently photogenic, had not, it would appear, provided enough spectacle to "bring them in."

During my visits to the "Caesar and Cleopatra" set I had been busily trying to organize an entrée to the studios in some capacity less galling than that of spectator. My agent at the time was Al Parker, the husband of Margaret Johnston. Despite his tough exterior, Al had an inescapable pioneer glamour for me as a one-time member of Griffith's stock company in Bioscope days and as the director of Douglas Fairbanks's "The Black Pirate."

After unsuccessfully trying to get me the script of a vehicle for Flanagan and Allen (I did a story outline for twenty-five pounds in which the two comedians ran a fish and chip shop, but the picture was never made), he arranged an interview for me with a new film tycoon.

No sooner had I put my face round the door of this gentleman's office than he looked up from his desk and advised me: "Don't start telling me the films are an art—because they're not."

After this uncompromising start, Al embarked upon a sales-talk, enumerating my scripts and my plays and pointing out the length of my experience in the cinema. He had got as far as "Thursday's Child" when the well-meaning tycoon interrupted him: "That's O.K.—you don't have to bring *that* up," said he. He turned to me: "I don't blame you," he remarked magnanimously, his eyes

resting on me in mingled pity and forgiveness. "I don't blame you for making a bad picture."

This condescension so infuriated me that after the interview—which led to nothing, needless to say—I determined to show moguls of the film industry that other people, such as the critics of *The Times*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *News-Chronicle*, the *Evening News*, and even *The Spectator*, etc., did not share their opinion of my unfortunate "Thursday's Child." I took a full-page advertisement in *The Cinema*, and quoted all the most enthusiastic excerpts from the reviews in the non-trade Press. Only when it was too late to make any alterations did I realize I hadn't been exactly tactful to my old friend Leslie Arliss in including a remark from one of the notices: "Worth Fifty Men in Grey." As Leslie had directed "The Man in Grey," I telephoned him the day before the particular issue of *The Cinema* was to appear, warned him what to expect and apologized. He took no umbrage. "That's all right, old man—I don't mind a bit," he said genially. "I really don't—but even if I did, I'd never make a stink about it in the trade. You know me—don't believe in writers washing their dirty linen in public. Good luck to you!"

Nothing whatever resulted from the advertisement—except my having to fork out twenty-five pounds for it, which I couldn't afford.

In the course of a few years, the gentleman of whom I was speaking vanished from the film business and I did not hear of him again until several months ago when a friend of mine told me that, unlike Leslie, this man clearly believes that *everybody* should wash their dirty linen in public, and proving a benefactor to the British housewife has interested himself in a chain of "Laundrettes."

The satisfaction I derived from having made a defiant, if expensive, gesture at the producers was nil—their reaction to it being rather less than that of a massed battalion of King Kongs at whom a paper pellet has been fired through a pea-shooter. Frustration impelled me to attempt an even more defiant gesture.

The company had shaken its head and pursed its lips like some beastly old Nannie at "the very idea" of that nasty, ill-bred "Thursday's Child" being allowed to make its curtsy in the West End along with the more favoured offspring: I gleefully visualized the collapse of several stout parties if my pet were presented at a palace (a picture-palace) where, under the ruling of a discrimina-

ting and vigilant Lord Chamberlain, even the British industry's most favoured darlings, on whom a hundred thousand pounds had been lavished, would have as much chance of entry as a divorcée to the Royal Enclosure. So, armed with my full-page *Cinema* advertisement, I went to see Mr. George Hoellering, manager of the Academy Cinema, Oxford Street, and the director of a fascinating and often cinematically poetic Hungarian film, disconcertingly called "Hortobagy," and later of "Murder in the Cathedral."

He agreed to have a look at "Thursday's Child" and a few mornings later I had the pleasure of sitting between Mr. Hoellering and his charming assistant, Miss Mai Harris, watching, entranced, the magic words "Written and directed by Rodney Ackland" materializing on the remote whiteness of the Academy screen, a whiteness beckoning and unattainable to British directors in those days as the snows of Everest might be to a rock climber.

In picking on the most celebrated of English *avant garde* cinemas as a possible theatre for the one attempt at film-direction I'd been allowed to make, I had no illusions that "Thursday's Child" was a masterpiece or even a particularly well-made picture. I suspected that the hauteur with which the film industry had viewed it was due no less to the style in which I had shot it than to the subject matter. After my initial interview with Mr. Hoellering, I knew that he, at least, would appreciate my reasons for reducing camera-movement to a minimum in the suburban scenes and only breaking out into the fashionable roving-camera style (which alone, as I learned to my cost, must be employed if one wished to avoid the damning epithet, "amateurish") in the crazy artificiality of the sequences in the studio.

I had adopted this technique with the full approval of my cameraman, Desmond Dickinson—who later attained ace-hood with his work on Olivier's "Hamlet"—and I was happy to find that Hoellering, too, fully approved. He agreed with me that the style of a moving picture should be suited to its subject—and that for every single product of British and American studios, ranging from "Curly Top" to "Rasputin the Mad Monk (Certificate 'A')", to be shot, as they then were, in the same thick, rich, black-molasses style of perpetually swooping, sweeping, gliding, sliding, skating and floating camera-movements was about as senseless as if all composers, from Coates to Shostakovich, were suddenly compelled to express their widely varying themes only in the manner of

Tchaikovsky's ballet music.

Although I had almost convinced myself that I had deliberately contrived the shots in the suburban garden scene at the beginning of "Thursday's Child" to look like a collection of dreary and faded snapshots in a suburban "snap album," I hardly expected anyone else to be convinced should I offer such an explanation. The one other I might have put forward—that the sequence had had to be shot in a couple of hours without any sun because a gentleman whose niece "didn't wear drawers" would insist on seating himself in front of the camera—sounded so much more like an Edward Lear limerick than the truth, I felt it would only provoke jeers.

I was so conscious of the appalling quality of this 250 feet or so of film that I hated the thought of its being seen. Whenever I took friends or relations to the picture, I would pretend to lose something under the cinema seats as soon as the shaming garden scene became imminent. Going down on hands and knees, I generally managed to make such a disturbance as I ferreted about amongst people's legs—occasionally coming up for air and to see if the garden had faded out yet—that I don't think any member of the audience within a six yards' radius of myself ever had an inkling of what Sally Ann Howes, Kathleen O'Regan and Wilfrid Lawson were doing in that garden, even if they got as far as realizing that there *was* a garden on the screen.

Another piece of strategy I had tried out once or twice was to have an attack of coughing directly the garden scene appeared: this made it necessary for a number of people to stand up, with a resentful, rusty whanging of seat-springs, as I stumbled painfully to the aisle where, as they subsided, I managed to hold their attention by a choking fit. Usherettes would dash up with glasses of water which I would gulp down: as I returned to my seat, the people in my row would rise and fall in rotation like the totem-pole dancers in "Rose Marie." By the time I sank, exhausted and scarlet-faced, into my place, the shameful garden would be well out of the way and we'd be safely in a tube train, with Stewart Granger expressing to Eileen Bennett the bruised idealism of a sensitive youth and Sally Ann looking understandably puzzled in the background.

To create a diversion on these lines was not practicable with an audience composed solely of Miss Harris, Mr. Hoellering and my-

self—but something had to be done. Improvising desperately as the fatal garden began to fade-in, I squirmed in my seat, peering anxiously downward and leaning this way and that. When the interest of Hoellering and Miss Harris was sufficiently aroused, I asked them, "Can you smell burning? I'm afraid I dropped my cigarette. Yes, I'm sure—the smell's getting stronger. Oughtn't we to look?" In no time at all, the three of us were crouching, kneeling or grovelling—to sniff out a cigarette-end under the Academy Cinema seats.

When I could keep it up no longer without arousing suspicion, I held up the half-smoked du Maurier concealed in my hand and, crying "Ah, here it is! Thank God! I should hate to be responsible for burning down my favourite cinema!" I resumed my seat. Alas! Sally Ann, Wilfrid and Kathleen were still yacking away obstinately in the faded snapshots so I had, after all, to resort to a choking attack. By the time Miss Harris had rushed to the office and returned with a glass of water and Mr. Hoellering had finished smacking me helpfully on the back, the garden and its inmates were rolled up in the projection-box out of harm's way.

From then on, I allowed the picture to run its course without further interruption—and when the house-lights went up, Mr. Hoellering said he found it a very touching and delightful film and would like to book it at his cinema for a run.

Not for the first time since I had entered the film business thirteen years before, I went home singing, feeling recognition of myself as a potentially great film director was on its way at last. I saw it all in my infatuated mind's eye: "'Thursday's Child'—the only British picture to merit the distinction of an Academy showing!" With all previous experience to warn me, I still did not suspect that Hoellering's flattering decision was to be the prelude to an interminable succession of frustrations and infuriations stretching so far into the future that the war would be over before "Thursday's Child" reached the Academy screen. Meantime, all sorts of brilliant British films about the British middle-classes, upper and lower, had been made, shown and praised as "an answer to 'Mrs. Miniver'" (who, in any case, no longer needed answering) and I had gone to America: over there, I did not learn that my picture was actually "*on*" in the West End until it was off.

My first shock on bringing to the company the glad news of

Mr. Hoellering's desire to book "Thursday's Child" was that the business executives, instead of being bowled over at the distinction I had earned for them, said they did not *want* the picture to be shown at the Academy Cinema. "Why not?" I asked, confounded. They shrugged and replied carelessly, "What would be the *point* of showing it?" I stared at them, doubtless with poached-egg eyes: surely, as businessmen, they wanted the film to take as much money as possible? Apparently not. They displayed an epoch-making indifference to profit; their dislike of the film was obviously stronger even than their cupidity.

After I had had several abortive interviews with various big-wigs, Mr. Hoellering—my champion by now—himself organized a meeting with one of the company's most important executives. While Hoellering was delivering a quietly impassioned speech on behalf of the picture, the executive gentleman, patently bored to nausea at the very mention of it, wearily closed his eyes—and in a moment or two was fast asleep. We allowed him forty winks and then coughed loudly to wake him—and Hoellering resumed his speech. The executive, looking a little flustered at having been caught napping, at last grudgingly granted permission for Hoellering to show "Thursday's Child."

Now began a struggle requiring even greater powers of persistence on Hoellering's part and mine: it produced an even greater display of stubborn resistance on the company's. Would they have the uncompleted and therefore meaningless montage sequence re-processed with the missing shots? No, they *wouldn't*; they had no intention of throwing good money after bad and, anyway, the shots had long ago been junked.

They had underestimated our nuisance-value. We pegged away at the executives like death-watch beetles on a delicious piece of fumed-oak. When we had reduced them to such a state that the sound of our names on the telephone must have been as upsetting to the nerves as another drop of water on the head of someone undergoing the Chinese water torture, they gave in: they said I could, at my own expense, re-shoot the missing scenes for incorporation in the "montage."

So the doors of a commercial studio opened for me again—though this time they only opened on to a place off the Edgware Road rather larger than a good-sized linen cupboard and at the cost of a hundred pounds.

Hoellering spent nocturnal hours with me in his cutting-rooms at Beaconsfield, re-doing the "montage" with the newly-shot scenes; these, I am sorry to say, did not seem to improve it very much, but that was not his fault. He had somehow retained his enthusiasm for the film after suffering the full horror of the garden snapshots and helped me make this sequence more endurable by cutting it practically in half.

Hoellering was going to put my film on in conjunction with a revival of "*La Femme du Boulanger*." This pleased me enormously because I thought not only that my respect for the Art of the Cinema would shine brightly from the screen like a beacon to cineastes in contrast to the open contempt for his medium expressed in Pagnol's film, but also that *his* film—which I detested—was bound to ensure mine a long run.

Nothing of the sort happened. The company would not allow "*Thursday's Child*" to be projected at the Academy during this period because the booking would clash with one already made by a Tottenham Court Road house for a three-day run as a second feature. Marcel Pagnol's film ran, of course, for months and months and months.

Hoellering's next Academy booking—made some time previously—was a film too long for anything but a news-reel to be shown with it. This also ran for months and months and months.

The next Academy première was a French film about a sensitive small girl—and, feeling that "*Thursday's Child*" in this programme would be one sensitive small girl too many, Hoellering once more put the Rodney Ackland opus back on the shelf. In November, 1946, it at last made its appearance, in company with Jean Vigo's highly unpopular picture, "*L'Atlantide*"—a superlative masterpiece of film-poetry beside which my little effort must have seemed like heavy-handed fumbling. I was flattered to think that my picture was actually on the same bill as Vigo's great work—but the combined attractions of both pictures only succeeded in eking out a run of just ten days.

So much for "*Thursday's Child*"—of which the impatient reader will from now on hear no more.

XII

LOVE, DEATH AND DERBY DAY

"To Birmingham by way of Beachy Head..."

It seemed to me, during the ensuing period of exile from the commercial studios, that if I momentarily turned my back on the celluloid mistress and returned to the theatre I might, by lavishing more attention upon my second love, rekindle the interest of my first. Fate, unusually co-operative, promptly provided me with an opportunity.

My play, "The Dark River," was going into production at the Whitehall Theatre, with Peggy Ashcroft in the part del Guidice had thought that Greta Gynt should play. Peggy and I would have liked Tyrone Guthrie or John Gielgud to direct it, but neither of them was free. Well, I thought, if I can prove my talents as a stage-director, I may, by this roundabout route, be able to crash into film-direction again. "The Dark River" advertisements and programmes therefore announced "Directed by the Author."

While we were casting the play, a young man called Peter Cushing interested and impressed me with the audition he did for the part of the leading man. I had never heard of him before but he was clearly an experienced actor: where, I asked him, had he gained his experience? To my astonishment, he showed me stills of himself playing opposite actresses like Carole Lombard. When the war broke out he had, in fact, been starring in Hollywood. Eager to return to England, he had fulfilled his existing commitments, refused new ones and packed up his goods and chattels—only to find, when he had burned his bridges, that it was impossible to get passage immediately from the States to England. After weeks of frustrated hanging about, he headed for the 49th Parallel, thinking that in Canada he might be able to join up in one of the services. It had taken him quite a time to get to Canada, where, on health grounds, he was rejected by all the services—and

as transport from Canada was almost as difficult to obtain as from America, nearly two years had elapsed between his leaving Hollywood and his arrival home, in convoy, aboard a banana ship. He was now going the rounds looking for a job, just like any actor who had never been to Hollywood—let alone made a success there.

Cushing is a most sympathetic, unassuming person, without a vestige of actor's vanity, and I was eager that he should play opposite Peggy. This was the one point on which she disagreed with me during the production : she thought he seemed too young and his personality too gentle for what was fundamentally a violent character. Michael Golden was cast instead. I resolved to remember Peter Cushing for some future production.

The newly-formed Contemporary Theatre Company, which was presenting "The Dark River," had, and was grateful for, certain contacts with the cinema : Robert Beatty was one of the backers of the play.

Waking up after the first night party, somewhat overhung, I ploughed through the morning papers which had been dumped beside my bed with a cup of unfriendly-looking tea. The notices of the play were what is known as "mixed"—but I was glad to see that the critics who didn't much care for the play itself had, at least, generally praised my direction of it. I lay back on my pillow, wishing I hadn't such a headache but feeling fairly optimistic : surely it was not unreasonable to hope that now somebody would come forward with a film for me to direct? The telephone rang. Could this be the offer I was waiting for? Tremulously, I picked up the receiver.

A bright foreign voice said it was just ringing to remind me not to be later than eight o'clock for my lecture that night. "What lecture?" I asked incredulously and with growing panic. "Why, don't you remember?" said the voice in surprised tones. "The lecture you are giving to the Free Hungarians on 'The Future of the Cinema.' It has been advertised for a month now and the Free Hungarians are all very much looking forward to it."

A cocktail party conversation with Paul Tabori some weeks before returned to me like a boomerang; I fell back on the pillow, stunned, and the telephone fell to the floor. The voice I could still hear quacking away from the instrument was Paul's—and it was only too horrifyingly true that at an advanced stage of a merry evening I had accepted his invitation to lecture his Free com-

patriots at their club.

I was still lying gasping and Paul's voice was still quacking into the bedroom carpet when Arthur Boys entered to congratulate me or condole with me on the notices. I blurted out to him the details of my plight. Arthur gave me no sympathy. "You'll just have to go through with it," he told me. "You'll probably have the time of your life. You're always lecturing everybody on the Art of the Cinema—and here's your chance to bore a roomful of people out of their wits without anyone being able to shut you up or change the conversation."

There was no denying the common sense of this, so with a lighter heart I retrieved the telephone. I explained that something must have gone wrong with the line and told Paul to expect me at the Free Hungarians' Club on the dot of eight o'clock that evening. True to my word, and as out of my wits with fear as Arthur expected my audience to be with boredom, I arrived at eight; I warned Paul that, as I had "never done anything like this before," I felt that I should probably not be able to speak for longer than twenty minutes—and hoped it would be all right if I filled in the rest of the time answering questions. He thought it would be quite all right.

I took my place on the platform; Paul, as chairman, introduced me and the Free Hungarians gave me an anticipatory "hand." I rose and faced them. Immediately I realized that this was far more petrifying than any stage appearance because one could *see* the audience as plainly as they could see oneself. Which of them was I supposed to look at? To single out a particular face to lecture to might seem like favouritism and would undoubtedly—if the chosen lecturee, although Hungarian, had any traces of self-consciousness—cause him or her acute embarrassment; besides, the two of us might end up by hypnotizing each other. On the other hand, to deliver each sentence to a different person would seem rather peculiar. To fix my eyes on some point above all the heads might be useful as a demonstration of how film stars register "Love" or "Saintliness" or "Ambition"—but if I sustained the pose for twenty minutes, surely the audience would think I was being very pretentious and delivering my lecture in a trance.

The only thing to do, I told myself, was to start talking and see what happened—and it would be best to imagine I was addressing not an assembly of Free Hungarians but *one* Hungarian whom I

had cornered and rendered speechless: if he wanted my views on the Future of the Cinema he was damn well going to get them! And the Past and Present of the Cinema, into the bargain, whether he wanted them or not!

I took a deep, though shaky breath, fixed my gaze more or less in the middle of the pond of upturned faces and cleared my throat. Instantly the air-raid sirens went—and everybody rushed out of the room.

A minute or two later, they all came back and by this time I was so steamed up to begin that I plunged in right away and never gave another thought to the problem of whom or what to look at.

The audience seemed rather pale and exhausted when I had finished—a result, I supposed, of the raid—and there were only a few questions, such as “What is the difference between ‘montage’ and ‘slapstick’?” “Would you say, then, that the Future of the Cinema depends on such films as ‘Thursday’s Child’?” and “Which do you consider more cinematically valid, ‘The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari’ or ‘Tilly’s Punctured Romance’?” After these had been answered, coffee and cakes were served and I went up to Paul and asked him if I had succeeded in making the lecture last twenty minutes. He assured me that I had. “How long did I speak for, altogether?” I asked out of curiosity. “Er . . . Let’s see . . .” he consulted his watch, muttered some calculations and looked up at me. “For two-and-a-half hours,” he said.

A short, slight, middle-aged Hungarian with a Japanese smile joined us and told me he had been very interested in the lecture, particularly the part about Alexander Korda and his films.

What I had said about Alexander Korda’s films was that they fulfilled the prophecy made by S. M. Eisenstein in his manifesto on the Future of the Cinema in 1929—the beginning of the Sound era. The Cinema, he prognosticated, would inevitably go through a bad period in which fundamentally vulgar films, devoid of all cinematic qualities, would, because of their veneer of culture—borrowed from literature and the Stage—be acclaimed as works of art. This was the period we were now living through, I told my Hungarian audience, and the best examples of these fundamentally vulgar works were the pictures of Alexander Korda and of Gabriel Pascal. I did concede, I believe, that Korda must have *something*: it took a certain kind of genius to be able to overlay a rousing cinematic subject like “The Scarlet Pimpernel” with so much

borrowed "culture" that the film left one about as limp with suspense and excitement as one would be after visiting an exhibition of Regency furniture.

The short, slight man with the Japanese smile drifted off when I had told him how glad I was that he was particularly interested in my remarks on Alexander Korda's productions. He was still smiling. Paul, I noticed, was looking at me with an odd, rather quizzical expression. I returned his look questioningly and then, suddenly struck by a terrible thought, clasped my hand to my forehead. "Oh, my God, Paul—how *awful*!" I cried. "I was simply expressing what I felt about films when I was lecturing and I'd completely forgotten that Korda and Pascal are Hungarians! Do you suppose everyone's madly offended? What a dreadful gaffe! Who was that little man, by the way?"

"Stephen Pallos," Paul replied.

"Pallos—who's he?" said I.

"Oh, I thought you knew him," said Paul. "You must have heard of him, haven't you? He's Korda's right-hand man."

I went home with a distinct feeling that none of the Hungarians in the British film industry would ever want me to write or direct a film for them.

As time went by, it began to look as though the Hungarians were not alone in this. I couldn't find *anybody*, even of my own nationality, who wanted me to write or direct a film for a commercial company. Nothing whatever resulted from my direction of "The Dark River" and I was duly cast down. It was propaganda pictures for the rest of my life I decided—with a sense of regret that proved to be quite uncalled for.

"Tenacity Rewarded..."

Jack Beddington, whom I had met over my M.O.I. efforts (he was chief of the Ministry's Film Section) asked me to write, in collaboration with L. A. G. Strong, a film about schoolteaching, intended to attract young people into this overworked and underpaid profession. I wondered who would direct it—and before long found an answer that seemed to me eminently satisfactory: *I* would.

I went to see Mr. Beddington, flourished my "Thursday's Child" notices and my *Cinema* advertisement (which had cost

£25 so it was a pity not to use it) and persuaded him to have the film run through. He liked it—and so I landed my second directorial assignment.

While Leonard Strong and I were working on the script, we conceived the idea that the subject was too important to be adequately treated in twenty minutes; we explained this to Mr. Beddington and induced him to give us an introduction to J. Arthur Rank. We hoped to persuade the flour and film emperor to back a feature-length picture on the splendours and miseries attending the life of a young schoolmistress with a vocation.

Armed with the introduction, we presented ourselves at Mr. Rank's office and were granted an interview. Leonard Strong left the talking to me—and so did Mr. Rank, who received us in silence and seemed to me to be using the intimidation technique of waiting, implacably mute, as so many employers do, until the Applicant for a Position is forced, out of sheer nervousness, to speak first. I have since been told that Mr. Rank is a shy and not unkindly man but that was not the impression he made on me. Under the level stare of his business eyes I was disconcerted: Leonard did not look particularly happy, either. I began to stammer out an explanation of our visit. Mr. Rank showed not a flicker of interest; apparently he had never heard of either of us, which, in view of L. A. G. Strong's renown as novelist, short story writer and critic, was less understandable in Leonard's case than mine.

I may be doing the magnate an injustice (my eyes being, as I once heard a woman describe the eyes of a lady friend, "out on stalks looking for slights"), but as far as I can recall, Mr. Rank did not utter a single word throughout the interview—and Leonard and I took our leave in silence more confounding, if anything, than that in which we had made our entrance.

Was it shyness that had tied Mr. Rank's tongue? Or had he, perhaps, said he would "see" us—and was keeping his word to the letter? Perhaps, though, it wasn't Mr. Rank we saw at all, but some waxwork or golem fixed in position behind his office desk to relieve the Most Important Man in British Pictures of interviews with people who Might Want To Get Something Out Of Him.

We were too shaken by this encounter with Big Business to seek backing for the film elsewhere. "The New School," as it was called, was made with the Crown Film Unit for the Ministry of Education and designed to run, as originally planned, for twenty

minutes. Baulked of having Peter Cushing as my leading man at the Whitehall, I got him into the picture when we went on the floor with it—and jolly good he was, too, though through circumstances beyond the control of everybody except the Civil Service, it did nothing, I'm afraid, to further him in his career.

In the film I had to contrast the "bad old" type of council school with the newly built "progressive" type by which the Government intended they should be superseded. Provided by the Ministry of Education with the address of what was considered the very worst of the old type of school building, I went with Edward Carrick, who was doing the sets, to look it over.

The moment we entered the cramped little mid-Victorian Gothic building, I was almost overcome by an indefinable, dream-like sensation which baffled me completely—until the sight of the Boys lavatory, in one corner of the grimy asphalt playground, acted upon me like Proust's madeleine, flooding my mind with memories from the subconscious. I saw myself as a small figure, being led across the playground to the "Boys" by one of the "big boys." The "I-have-been-here-before" feeling I was experiencing had the most simple of all explanations: I *had* been there before—at the age of eight, when my father had first lost his money.

Teddy Carrick and I were completely charmed by the headmaster who, like the architecture of the school, seemed to be an invention of Dickens and Cruikshank. The dear old man pursued a cosy tradition of letting the pupils, in winter, bring potatoes to class—to be baked on the stove and, after they had warmed chilblained hands, eventually devoured. His urchins adored him. As for us, we both felt lower than vermin as this enchanting character, little suspecting the reason why his school had been singled out by the Ministry, showed us round and made us welcome.

Whatever the views of the Ministry of Education, Teddy Carrick and I, though uneasy at finding reactionary tendencies in ourselves, couldn't help feeling that the bad old type of school (if this one was anything to go by) had qualities that deserved to be preserved; the thought of their being swept away made us feel a little sad and tearful, like a couple of rather nice old Blimps with fading purple faces.

On location in Yorkshire, I had two of the happiest months of my life: I "belonged," I was *accepted* as an experienced film director, the technicians called me "Guv" and we all worked in

jolly comradeship and harmony—everyone intent on turning out a good picture. All was sweetness and light—until the New Spirit of Trade Unionism raised its mean-spirited little head.

We had been waiting, as always on location, for the infuriating sun to come out. We had been waiting for three-and-a-half days. When the sun came out at last and everything was set to start shooting, it was discovered that an important prop, needed some nails knocking into it. Calamitously, there was no member of the Carpenters' Union with us. Anyone in the unit, from Vvonne Rorie, the leading lady, to the clapper boy, could have knocked the nails into place but none of them was a member of the Carpenters' Union so they could only take hammer in hand at the risk of causing a general strike.

I am told that the Hollywood studios employ an individual known as The Green Man who is authorized to undertake odd jobs of this kind in the absence of the appropriate union member. I toyed with the idea of constituting myself, in the field as it were, Temporary Acting Green Man—but I realized the Association of Cine-Technicians would regard such a measure as iniquitous. There was nothing for it but to pack up and return to our lodgings—casting irritated glances at the blue sky, maliciously adorned as it was with just the right sort of clouds for a respectable documentary. We knew only too well that it would be grey and lowering by the time members of the Carpenters' Union arrived from London—and that it would remain so for several days. When they did arrive, one of them proved to be a problem: more—he seemed to be what *I* was once accused of being by a rather hysterical headmaster in my schooldays: "The Rotten Apple in the Barrel that Turns them ALL Bad."

It had been arranged for "The New School" unit to lunch every day at the nearest British Restaurant and this we all did—sitting at a communal table and munching fish and chips, or rissoles and chips, or shepherd's pie and chips, or cottage pie and chips, or sausages and chips, or *portion* of chips, content as any patrons of a Corner House. That is, we were content until the Rotten Apple was dropped in our midst.

At lunch time on the day following his arrival, the Other Apples In The Barrel seated themselves as usual round the British Restaurant table—but when plates of whatever-it-happened-to-be and chips were placed before them by voluntary lady-helpers, as

one Apple they pompously folded their arms and, assuming the expression of Tolpuddle Martyrs, sat glaring in front of them.

Enquiries from the only four uncorrupted Apples (production-manager, leading lady, cameraman and myself) revealed that a protest was being made—not, as we had momentarily supposed, because a green vegetable had been served with the something-and-chips, but against the indignity of union members having to eat in a British Restaurant.

In writing the script, Leonard Strong and I had decided it was no use trying to hide the fact that teachers needed nerves of steel, the courage of tight-rope-walking-lion-tamers, the hides of film executives and the stamina of waitresses, as well as love for little children and the ability to teach them and to live on a modest income—with or without an invalid father to keep.

We argued that there was no reason why our film should not be made on the same principle as the Armed Services propaganda films of the time, which made it clear that members of the Services must be bloody, bold and resolute as well as obedient and bright and willing to be killed, wounded and poorly paid, because it was all in a Great Cause.

The Ministry of Education accepted this argument, approved of our attitude and gave its sanction to the script. When, at the end of several months and at the cost of seventeen hundred pounds of taxpayers' money, the film was completed, the Ministry took one startled look at it—and banned it. The only time it was ever projected in front of an audience was when Paul Rotha organized a show of Government-sponsored films which he had selected from the many (it seemed like thousands) commissioned by various Ministries during the war and then banned by them; he had apparently unearthed these rejected works from the vaults where they were stored away until such time as they could be decently cast into oblivion on the junk heap.

In an introductory speech to "The New School," Rotha referred to it as "a completely new form of documentary" and said he found it warm and true and human. I was, of course, gratified—and if Rotha's approval was the only good I was to get out of "The New School," apart from the pleasure of making it, I would try to be satisfied.

It was my mother who suggested that this, my second directional effort, might possibly be used as a key to open a commercial studio's

door: if I was really pleased, personally, with the film, she said, why didn't I show it to one of the film companies—say A.B.P.? I was momentarily taken aback. Would that be a good idea? I thought it over and decided that it would.

I went to see one of the more amiable executives of A.B.P. and told him boldly that I wanted him to look at a short film which I had directed. He gave me a weary, resigned glance, indicating that he knew I would be on his doorstep for ever if he refused, and sighed "O.K." "The New School" was run through for him and, to my excitement, he seemed impressed. I could scarcely believe my ears when he remarked that if I could direct such a subject as this, I could direct *anything*. "Well, have *you* something I'd be allowed to direct?" I asked eagerly. "We might have," said he. "Come back to my office."

We returned to his office, lesser executives were summoned to the presence and the possibility of "using Ackland" was discussed—with, I have to confess, little enthusiasm on the part of anybody except myself: I was *warmly* enthusiastic. A.B.P. were to make a film of Simenon's "Newhaven-Dieppe" and it was eventually agreed that if I would work on the screen play, I should be given a chance to direct it.

As a passionate admirer of Simenon's work, I was thrilled and delighted at the prospect of creating, from one of his novels, a gem of Cinema Art.

My excitement diminished somewhat when, calling at A.B.P.'s offices, I was given only a contract as screen-writer to sign. I asked where the contract as director was but was told this need not be discussed until I had finished work on the screen-play. As I had imagined we were past the "discussion" stage, I experienced a slight misgiving. I finished work on the screen-play. I could not understand why I wasn't asked to meet Simenon, which I would have loved to do, when he was invited over by A.B.P. I suspected gloomily that things were not going to fall out at all as I wished—and my worst forebodings were realized when I read in the newspapers that the film was to be directed by Lance Comfort and called "Temptation Harbour."

"Never mind, darling," said my mother trying to cheer me up. "I don't suppose it'll turn out very well without you to direct it." I told her I was afraid it probably *would* be good—if, that is to say, they did not entirely alter my dialogue: after all, Bobbie Newton

was to play the lead and Simone Simon the ruthless little bitch who ruined him, and they were both first-class actors.

I did not go to the première, but I couldn't resist reading the notices—in the vain hope that some critic would have mentioned the writing. The reviews were on the whole favourable, though several commented on Simone Simon's "unaccountably bad" performance in the climactic scene. My curiosity aroused, I went along to the Warner Theatre to see the film.

Much to my surprise and delight, I found that my dialogue had been retained almost without cuts and exactly as written. Something distinctly odd had happened, though: all the lines I had written for Kathleen Harrison in the big scene at the end of the story had been given to Simone Simon. As they were entirely out of character for her, no wonder the French actress had been somewhat baffled by them. Still, I had no reason to complain; the greatest respect had been shown for my work as a writer and not a word of mine had been changed.

During this period, I was asked to write a sketch for Françoise Rosay, who had escaped from occupied France via Switzerland. She was giving a matinee in aid of the Free French, at the Haymarket Theatre—a one-woman show on the strength of which she was foredoomed to be hailed as the French Ruth Draper. I used to go for conferences with her to the Hyde Park Hotel, where she would always pad about the room in her stockinged feet, pouring out for her guests glasses of Scotch whisky—half-a-tumblerful at a time: she was obviously unfamiliar with the usages of this alcoholic beverage and seemed to be under the impression that it was a British form of Cinzano. I never heard anyone protest or point out Madame Rosay's mistake to her.

Mine was to be the only sketch in English and the très formidable French actress worked out with me that she should appear as a très formidable French actress—the Comédie Française "Phédre" of the century—who, having escaped to England from occupied France, goes to see a British casting-director who requires "a typical Frenchwoman" for a part in a film. She is told she is "not the type, not *French* enough." Leaving the casting office, gloomily bewildered, she meets an English actress whom she knows and, on her friend's advice, returns and beards the casting-director again. But this time she perches herself on the corner of his desk, shows her knees and lights a cigarette with the pert gaminerie



SHE WASN'T IN THE CAST LIST

Renée Asherson in "Caesar and Cleopatra"; Olga Edwards in the background



"WHERE IS THE STORY FOR SID FIELD?"

Gabriel Pascal gloomy on his Director's Throne



"WHAT ARE THEY UP TO?"

Dr. Caligari in reel confusion



HIS PLAY WAS A FLOP, SO . . .

D. W. Griffith directing "Intolerance"

expected of ladies in their fifties (if they happen to be French), chucks the casting-director under his chins with a provocative forefinger and cries "You arre so naughtee! Mais oui! I sink you arre a verree naughtee boy!" in the combined accents of Alice Delysia, Yvonne Arnaud and a provincial "Fifi" in the number two tour of "The Belle of New York." This convinces him that she is a "typical" Frenchwoman and she gets the part.

I used to look forward to the sessions with Madame Rosay, not only because of the Cinzano-Scotches but because they reminded me somehow of sessions with Yvette Guilbert in the 'thirties, after the great and legendary disease had bought the rights of one of my plays. I say "bought," but the truth was that in a consciously abandoned moment—of which I enjoyed every second at the time and later irritably regretted—I had passionately cried: "Ah, Madame Guilbert, it is such a great privilege for me—*une privilege magnifique*—that you should appear in a play of mine, let us not speak of money. I . . . I *give* you the French rights in my play for ever." "And the Swiss rights, also?" Madame Guilbert enquired. (She did, in fact, do a broadcast of the play from Switzerland during the war.) "Any rights you want, Madame Guilbert!" I said, besottedly. She looked at me. "You are sure you mean this?" she asked. "*Absolument sure!*" said I. "There is no need," said Madame Guilbert, "to purse the lips like that when pronouncing the French 'u' sound. You should place the tongue close against the palate and ponounce like this 'U' . . . 'u' . . . 'u' . . ."

Madame Rosay had the same directness as Madame Guilbert—and I sensed in her, too, the same genius. Her Haymarket matinee was a succès fou and our little satire on British casting-directors received as much applause as the other sketches—though not from the film producers present. Umbrage and exception were taken, I learned afterwards. My spies reported that I had been the subject of many a rhetorical question as to who I thought I was, to libel the film industry, and what I thought I was up to, and what, in any case, did I know about the Comedie Française and "Phédre" (what, indeed?), that I should set myself up to point a finger of scorn at the casting-directors of British films.

In spite of this, the studio doors were not slammed in my face: I was not given another chance to direct, but Marcel Helman asked me to write the script—to be based on one already written

by Emmerich Pressburger from a play by Percy Robinson and Terence de Marney. It was the story of a sex maniac and was called "Wanted for Murder."

I rather took to the idea as Percy Robinson was an old friend and the first fellow-playwright to encourage me; he had, in fact, when we were both acting with the "Lena Ashwell's" in 1928, been indirectly responsible for the production of my first play, for it was he who suggested I should let the de Marney Brothers have the script of "Improper People."

"Robbie's" abhorrence of capital punishment was as strong as my own and, like his earlier success "To What Red Hell," "Wanted for Murder" was designed to influence public opinion against this form of Church and State-sponsored entertainment for the masses. Eric Portman was to play the murderer who—wondering what it is that comes over him when, instead of curling up with a good book or taking some nice clean-living girl to the cinema, he goes to Hyde Park or Hampstead Heath in the hope of strangling a few tarts—discovers himself to be descended from a public hangman. What he quite rightly takes exception to is that the grandfather from whom he has inherited this odd idea of enjoyment, was *paid* for indulging it—instead of, as in his own case, having his life made a misery by the police.

Unfortunately the dainty though clammy hands of the Hays Office had closed on the script before I started work on it and by the time the picture was finished, little remained to show that either scriptwriter or original author had any deep feelings about capital punishment, whether for or against.

Marcel Helman had, from the start visualized a wide American distribution for the film, and the screen-play in all its stages, had to be submitted to the Hays Office for approval. In spite of Marcel's constant admonitions that no syllable must be written that might conflict with Mr. Hays's idea of preserving the high moral sense of the American Public—which consisted, it would seem, entirely of sub-normal Sunday school teachers—I committed several unexpected bloomers.

The most surprising, perhaps, was a scene in which Barbara Everest, as the murderer's mum, was to be shown throwing into the drawing-room fire the evidence of her son's guilt—his diary—as the police battered on the door. It was, I thought, a beautifully written scene of great emotion, devised for a beautiful actress of

great emotional powers, and I delivered it to Mr. Helman full of confidence.

I should have known by now that if you expect a pat on the head from a film producer you invariably get a kick in the pants. After reading the scene with a grim face—a difficult feat for Marcel, with his smooth, round countenance of pink-and-white benignity—he flung it huffily on the desk and asked me if I “would please read again the list from the Hays Office of what the Hays Office was not permitting the screenwriters to put.” He handed me the list and with a puzzled sigh I read it again.

Familiar with most of it, I had taken every care to ensure that Barbara Everest would not be shown in bed with a man (even though one or both of them had a foot on the floor), that none of her lines would bring ridicule on the clergy, that she should not perform—either solo or in company—a sexually suggestive dance, that neither the diary nor her son’s behaviour would force the word “lousy” to her lips, and that the devout souls of American audiences would not be outraged nor their moral standards jeopardized by hearing her ejaculate “Oh God!” or “My God!” or even just “God!”

The clause in the Hays Code which had escaped my notice until then, read (I quote from memory): “No sympathetic character shall be shown destroying evidence which may bring a criminal to justice.” We got over it by arranging for Miss Everest to fall in a faint just in time to prevent her flinging the diary into the fire.

Marcel Helman is an endearing character and I treasure two particularly endearing memories of him during the making of “Wanted for Murder.” At one of the early script conferences he brooded for some moments before exploding with an Idea. “Always,” pronounced Marcel portentously, in the ghastly silence that precedes the revelation of a film producer’s Idea at a script conference, “Always when comes on the murderer, he is Hume-ing.” The silence deepened. At last someone ventured: “He’s *what*, Marcel?”

“Always when he comes on, he is hume-ing.”

“*Hume-ing*?”

Marcel looked affronted. “What’s the matter—don’t you like this idea?” He turned to me: “Make a note of that, Rodney,” he ordered. “I want that in the script—always when comes Eric Portman, he is humeing.”

"But . . . er . . ." I searched desperately for clues; "are you sure that Eric Portman can hume?"

"What do you mean, can Eric hume? Of course he can hume—you can hume, I can hume, everybody is always humeing."

Knowing that film producers rarely have an Idea unless it is based on something they remember from a successful picture of the type under discussion, I had been trying to recall some film about a sex-murderer. I could only remember one but fortunately it was the one in which lay the explanation of Mr. Helman's baffling verb: Peter Lorre's entrances in the early part of Fritz Lang's "M" were always heralded by the ominous murmur of the sex-maniac humming Grieg's "In the Hall of the Troll King" from "Peer Gynt." Marcel's idea was adopted and whenever Eric Portman came on in "Wanted for Murder" he was "hume-ing."

As a reward, perhaps, for my being the only person at the script conference to understand his idea, Marcel asked me to lunch with him at his home. Sipping sherry and discussing the script before luncheon we were interrupted by the entrance of a tiny figure who stared at us uncompromisingly, finger in mouth. Except for the figure's being only three feet in height and wearing frilly skirts, puff-sleeves and ringlets, I might, had he not already been in the room with me, have mistaken it for Marcel. It turned out, on introduction, to be his daughter.

"Come here, my dear," Marcel invited her, beaming and melting and opening wide his arms. "You love your Daddy, don't you? Come, my darling, and give me a nice kiss. You love your Daddy?"

"No." said the child. Which put an end to *that* conversation.

The last time I saw Marcel's daughter, she was an attractive girl of about eighteen, very much attached to her father and no longer too shy to admit it.

After the war, I went to see "Wanted for Murder" when it was running on Broadway without conspicuous success. I didn't think it was helped much by the obstinately upper-class accents of Derek Farr and Dulcie Grey as a London bus conductor and his girl friend—but that we had in no way impaired the high moral standards of the American public was made clear to me by a piece of dialogue I overheard on the way out. "I can't take these British movies," said a member of it to his girl. "They got no guts—

never seem to give ya more'n a coupla killings." I walked away "hume-ing" to myself.

"Double, double, toil and trouble . . ."

My next assignment, following "Wanted for Murder" was, by way of a nice change, on "Love Story"—a film to be directed by Leslie Arliss with Margaret Lockwood, Stewart Granger, Tom Walls and Patricia Roc. The script had been written by Doreen Montgomery and I was to do "additional dialogue." Miss Montgomery, bearing her script, presented herself at Albany, where I then lived, and turned out to be a pretty blonde with enormous blue eyes who would, I decided promptly and unjustifiably, be more suitably employed in front of a camera than behind a typewriter. I couldn't see her as a screenwriter at all.

This, Doreen has since told me, was quite evident. According to her, I relieved her of her script, led her into the sitting-room, pressed a book into her hand and urged her to "sit on the sofa and read while I get on with the work." While I went through the script and made notes, Doreen several times attempted to say something to me; I gently "sh . . . shed" her as if she was a child disturbing the profound thoughts of a grown-up. It says much for Doreen that she did not "fetch me one"—for, as I learned later, she already had several successful scripts (including "The Man in Grey") to her credit and before graduating from the hard school of newspapers to the film studios had taken a degree at Edinburgh University. During "Love Story" I apologized for my treatment of her. "Oh, that's all right," said Doreen indulgently. "I'd been warned you were . . . eccentric."

In working on this film I was guiltily aware that I was breaking a vow. Years before, when "Live, Love and Laugh" was being made by B.I.P., Margaret Yarde and I, both hating blood sports, had taken a solemn oath that we would never have anything to do with any picture in which Tom Walls was appearing, because he went in for stag hunting and kept, we were told, his own pack of stag-hounds. We were not sure where he indulged in this revolting "sport" but were determined to find out so that we could put into practice a charming scheme we had devised: just before the hunt was up, we would ride out with a horde of mongrels drenched in aniseed at our heels and these odorous dogs, whom we planned

should, after a mile or two, scatter in all directions, would lure the hounds from the scent of the stag and thoroughly confuse them while their quarry got safely away.

Dear old Margaret and I never did carry out our little plot—and here was I working on a film with Tom Walls in the cast.

"Love Story," as I recall it, was a sad piece in which Margaret Lockwood, who appeared to play "Cornish Rhapsody" as well as Harriet Cohen did in fact play it, had only a year to live and Stewart Granger had to resign himself to going blind—or maybe it was the other way round.

In one scene, Leslie Arliss wanted "Jimmie" to dive from a Cornish cliff into the sea—but the actor insisted that the stunt-man who had been brought along be allowed to show his prowess and, in long-shot, double for the star. Leslie gave a quizzical smile and said "O.K." It was unfortunate that "Jimmie" had overlooked the fact that the intrepid stunt-man lacked the Granger stature and physique: he was, as Leslie knew, quite short and had bandy legs.

To celebrate the première of "Love Story," Leslie gave a dinner party at the Savoy. I saw Miss Lockwood and Mr. Granger taking a glass at the pre-prandial cocktail gathering but when dinner was served their seats at table were and remained empty. Leslie seemed a little hurt. "How very ungracious of Maggie and Granger to leave—I wonder why they did?" I said to him. "Oh, I daresay Jimmie can't forgive me for that bandy-legged double," he replied. Well, I thought, perhaps Jimmie had some reason for annoyance—but that Maggie should have taken exception to being "doubled" by Harriet Cohen was quite unthinkable. She must, I concluded, in the trade union phrase, have "come out in sympathy."

To round off this chapter I find it necessary to use a flashback technique and revert to 1939 when Ted Black asked me to write, in the shortest possible time, another story on the same lines as "Bank Holiday," with cross-cuts of a group of people all of whom would be bound up in, responding to or re-acting against the events of some particular day. I had waited three years for such a chance. "What about Derby Day?" I suggested. "Derby Day! Splendid! Go ahead and write it!" said Mr. Black. He was full of enthusiasm and so, indeed, was I—and we produced a script, in which there was a leading part for Kathleen Harrison,

which pleased everybody. War broke out—and the picture was shelved.

Sometime in 1944, a meeting of screenwriters was called to discuss with Sir Michael Balcon the possibility of making an immense film covering all aspects of Britain's war effort. It was to be, if our plans could be brought to fruition, "The All-Industry Film"—every British studio sharing in its production and most of our reputable directors collaborating on its direction. The idea appealed to Sir Michael and he invited us to discuss it further with him. After two or three meetings, I put up a suggestion as to how the subject should be tackled. The suggestion was well received, the project approved, and the Screenwriters' Association voted me the writer to whom the scripting should be entrusted. I was delighted to have this honour bestowed upon me and went to work determined that it should not be the scriptwriter's fault if this did not turn out to be one of the most memorable films ever made. Two weeks after I had delivered a full treatment, the war ended. The picture was shelved.

XIII

CINEMA ART FOR ART'S SAKE—AND FROM MARIA CHAPDELAINE TO MAPLE SYRUP

"The old gods return . . . (in some confusion) "

One of my most patient listeners when I hold forth on the Art of the Cinema is Olwen Vaughan, an ardent cineaste and daughter of the Reverend Hemming Vaughan, founder of early film societies. Shortly after the war, Olwen and I were deploring the debased state of the contemporary cinema and expressing the opinion that unless something was done to educate the movie-going public which had never seen silent films it would have no standards by which to judge and condemn the current trash; we wept for those like ourselves who had recognized the cinema as an art form, we wept for those who had had no opportunity to do so, we wept for the cinema which was being strangled to death by the vulgar film industry. Then we dried our eyes and *thought*—until the idea occurred to us that the London Film Society, which had passed peacefully away, could be recalled to life as The *New* London Film Society.

Olwen, who has a genius for organization, undertook to see that former members were rallied and new members enrolled, and we planned the programmes together. When we announced that our first season would cover "Fifty Years of Films" and include cinema landmarks from the earliest days to the present, the response was tremendous.

Our first programme, we decided, would obviously have to be D. W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation," the first major masterpiece of the screen. The performance was to be given at the Scala Theatre. A great many people, we realized, were under the impression that all early films, even major works, had been screened to the accompaniment of a jangly piano; we, of course, knew better and proposed to present "Birth of a Nation" as it had first been presented—with an orchestral accompaniment. We managed to obtain the

original score from New York and we engaged an orchestra of thirty-five instruments, to be conducted by Leslie Bridgewater.

The great day, a Monday, dawned. It found me, in the morning pleasantly relaxed and confident that everything was in perfect order, and that the evening would see the Scala packed with raptured cineastes. The telephone rang—I answered it sleepily. And suddenly leapt out of bed as though a scorpion had been introduced beneath the bedclothes. The orchestra had arrived at the Scala to rehearse, it appeared, but was unable to do so because, through some regrettable oversight, there were no music stands.

I telephoned wildly and vainly all over London for music stands and eventually tore round to the Scala to ask Leslie Bridgewater if *he* could suggest some source of supply or knew who the unscrupulous creature could be who had cornered the music stand market. I discovered the orchestra rehearsing circumspectly on the Scala stage: a number of music stands had been *found* in some dark recess of the theatre—but nobody had been able to pass this comforting information on to me because my telephone had been “permanently engaged.” Relieved, though still rattled, I mopped my brow and went home.

That evening, the Scala was indeed packed—and Olwen and I sat in a box beaming down at our members. But the house lights didn't go down. The curtains masking the screen remained obstinately closed. “What can be the matter?” I whispered anxiously to Olwen. We scuttled backstage to see—and were told by Mr. Langman, stage director of the Scala for many years, “Well, there are too many musicians for the orchestra pit—it just won't hold them.”

Leslie Bridgewater thought we might solve the problem by putting some of the musicians into the stage-boxes and this we managed to do—but the poor things looked wretchedly cramped and one violinist, as the baser elements of the audience hopefully noted, stood in danger of having an eye blacked by the elbow of another. Once the film had started, the audience paid no further attention to the orchestra—until it caused a considerable confusion by striking up “My Country 'tis of Thee.” Some members of the audience, taking this to be our national anthem, rose loyally to their feet—others, more knowing, remained smugly seated. “Communist!” hissed the standers to the sitters; “Fathead!” these spat back. “It's *not* ‘God Save The King’!” Fortunately

the episode was over before blows could be exchanged. The evening was, on the whole, a huge success.

Our next presentation, "Intolerance," passed off without untoward incident—and gave me the unexpected pleasure of meeting Mr. Howard Gaye, who played Jesus in the film and now lives at Wembley. Mr. Gaye spoke with great admiration of Griffith despite the fact that the great director had inflicted unnecessary suffering upon him during the scene of the Crucifixion. The unfortunate Mr. Gaye was hanging painfully on the Cross when a break for lunch was called and the entire unit streamed off the set leaving him there for one-and-a-half hours—forgotten. His remarks when Mr. Griffith and the others returned were, Mr. Gaye confessed, scarcely in character. Mr. Griffith seemed, in a dignified way, a little put out by this: "I think he liked to feel an actor was *living* his part," said Mr. Gaye. "He wanted to have everything just right."

I was reminded of the efforts made to have everything "just right" in a religious film which Donald Taylor once directed for Mr. Rank. An army gentleman who had served in Palestine was engaged to advise on local colour in those parts. He took the job very seriously and one day when Donald was trying to cope, without a shepherd's skill, with a flock of sheep, the gentleman bustled up to him in a great tizzy and said: "This won't do at all. These sheep are not right—the Palestine sheep are much curlier." "Well, these are the only sheep I can get," said Donald, "so they'll just have to be used. There's nothing I can do about it." "Nothing you can *do*?" cried the stickler for authenticity. "You can get *wigs* for them, can't you?"

To return to the New London Film Society—"The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" provided one of the sensations of the season. Olwen and I arrived at the Scala and confidently took our accustomed places in a box; the orchestra had been well rehearsed, music stands were available, and we looked forward to an enjoyable evening. We fixed our eyes on the screen. "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" opened smoothly. Roughly ten minutes later Olwen and I clutched each other, saying in horror: "Oh, my God! They've put the last reel on instead of the second."

We sped from our box up countless stairs to the Scala's projection room: the heavy, fireproof door was locked. Olwen beat upon it—and nothing happened. Her spectacles flashing with

determination, she turned to me and said : " I'll get in *somehow* and stop the film. *You* go back to the box and explain to the audience about the mistake." I rushed downstairs, entered the box and waited for the film to stop. It didn't stop. The last reel came to an end and was followed by the third reel. Obviously, despite her determination, Olwen had been unable to penetrate into the projection room. I went to the front of the box and, while the film continued, shouted an apology to the audience : " I'm awfully sorry but a mistake has been made—the reel you have just seen is the *last* in the film; it should have come at the *end*." " What did I tell you? " said a triumphant voice from the stalls. It was Vasco Laszlo, the artist, speaking. It transpired that he had been brought to the film by a member of the Film Society and after the first ten minutes had said, " I can't make head or tail of this—what *are* they up to? " The member had heatedly silenced him with, " This is an *intellectual* film. Anybody intelligent can understand it. Don't display your ignorance! " When I heard this I regretted having made my announcement; it would doubtless have been better to say nothing.

. " *Under Northern Skies . . .* "

The New London Film Society was in full swing when Bill Gillette came to me with an idea which reminded me that, in my eagerness to show the public the work of great directors of the past, I had almost forgotten my intention to be one of the great directors of the future. Bill said he was sure the possibilities of making films in Canada had never been properly explored—and yet Canada had so much to offer in the way of magnificent scenery. If I could suggest a story with a Canadian background, he had no doubt he could raise the money to make it—and I should, of course, direct.

Some years before I had read Louis Hémon's " *Maria Chapdelaine*," which had as its central characters a French-Canadian peasant girl and her lover, a trapper who died tragically in a blizzard. It was just the sort of subject I longed to direct. I saw the film as a beautiful, poetic work on the lines of " *Farrebique* "—with the relentless march of the seasons through the cycle of a year echoing in the human emotions of the characters. The story was authentically Canadian and the film could only properly be made in Canada.

Bill Gillette agreed that it would be an ideal subject and I was so enthusiastic that I immediately set to work on the script, leaving Bill and Nicholas Davenport, who was interested in the project, to find backing for the film.

The first person they approached was the head of one of the big American companies. It was a little difficult to persuade him that the story was filmable, so they dug up a copy of Duvivier's film about Maria Chapdelaine, made in 1930, and showed it to him. He sat through it morosely and made only one comment. This was evoked by the sequence in which Maria, fearing her lover lost, prays to Our Lady and promises to say a thousand Ave Marias for his safe return; all through a day of anguish, as she goes about her work, she tells her beads. The American mogul snorted: "If you want the film to be a success," he said, "you'll have to think up sumpin better'n having dat dame mooching around all that time playing with them beads." He was not inclined to give our film his support.

Undaunted by this rebuff, Bill and Nicholas continued their quest for a backer and eventually—though how this came about I do not know—it appeared that Korda, who was in America at the time, would sponsor "Maria Chapdelaine." I was given an office at 145 Piccadilly and there I completed the script. We started casting.

The actress I passionately wanted to play Maria was Michele Morgan—but she was not available. We signed up Barbara White. Michael Rennie, whom I had last seen as a guardsman without a word to say in "Bank Holiday," was suggested for Maria's lover; he was otherwise engaged. It looked as if we would be lucky enough to get Trevor Howard for the part. At last the film was fully cast and we were all impatient to start work.

Bill arrived at Albany one morning looking pleased and excited. "We're all set," he said. "You go to Canada next week and find suitable locations and I'll follow." Happy as a sandboy, off I went to Canada where, within a few days, I was joined by Bill. We found perfect locations, the air was stimulating, we knew we were going to make a splendid film. Our elation began to ebb away as time passed and no cast arrived. We cabled Nicholas Davenport and received the reply: "Cast cannot get flight because of Labour Conference at Montreal. Go ahead shooting exteriors with doubles for leading players. Unit arriving by boat."

To our astonishment, there was no cameraman in the "unit" which in due course put in an appearance; it consisted solely of an assistant camera operator and a continuity girl. We were eager to waste no more time, so we tried shooting the film without stars and without a cameraman—a somewhat tricky thing to do.

On one location the local people, hearing that we were filming, or at any rate attempting to film, "Maria Chapdelaine," told us that the real Maria Chapdelaine was still alive and could be found at a mountain resort not far from where we were. Naturally we felt we must go to see her.

Maria, as described in the book and as we intended to show her on the screen, was a beautiful, simple girl, rather silent, rather shy with downcast eyes. The real Maria Chapdelaine had developed into an elderly and voluble businesswoman, who owned a number of "Maria Chapdelaine chalets," which she let to visitors, and a number of "Maria Chapdelaine shops," selling "Maria Chapdelaine rock cakes," "Maria Chapdelaine tea cosies," and other "Maria Chapdelaine" tat. It was most disillusioning—but nothing to the disillusionment to follow.

While London maintained a disturbingly dead silence, we went on shooting as best we could, but things did not go very smoothly. A canoe sequence, which was to have been thrillingly spectacular, was spoiled for us when the man we had hired as the all-Canada canoe ace fell out of his craft into the St. Lawrence River the moment the starting pistol went off. An Indian chief whom we hoped to employ insisted on discussing the price for his services over a bottle of fire-water; as the contents of the bottle diminished, his price increased until, by the time the bottle was empty, he was demanding a sum that not even M.G.M. could have afforded to pay.

Suddenly a cable came from Davenport: "Get long shots of doubles for Maria and lover embracing against waterfall for final fade-out." "He must have gone mad!" I said. Bill moaned: "Doesn't he understand that unless the lover dies the film's meaningless?" We cabled Davenport: "What's happening?" He replied: "Korda disapproves of script. It is being re-written by Elizabeth Montagu." I knew nothing of Miss Montagu's work and was beside myself with rage. I telephoned London. "This is monstrous!" I shouted across the Atlantic. "The picture *can't* end in *syrup*. And if anybody else is going to work on the

script, I should have some say in the matter. I suggest you get Jim Williams." "O.K." said London.

A new story-treatment was air mailed to us. The only resemblance it bore to the original story was that the characters had the same names. Bill and I felt there was positively no point in making the film. So, apparently, did Korda—for next day Davenport cabled us: "Pack up and come home. Korda does not wish to continue with the film."

"Well, that's that," said Bill. "Home we go."

"I'm not going home," I told him, "I'm going to America to see Korda."

While Bill headed for England, I crossed the 49th Parallel into the States and proceeded to New York where I learned that Korda was staying at one of the luxury hotels. I was suddenly a little nervous, remembering my disastrous evening with the Free Hungarians, but I telephoned him. He asked me to come and see him—and when I did so and poured out my heart to him over "Maria Chapdelaine" he was perfectly charming. Of course it would make a beautiful film, he said—a film poem. "But . . . but why did you disapprove of my script, then?" I said. "What do you mean?" asked Korda. "I had a cable from London saying so," I assured him. "But I have never read your script!" cried he. "The story you have told me is beautiful. The film must be made. It would be madness to spend less than a year on it—in Canada. And, of course, Maria must be Michele Morgan."

I had the impression that *we* were to make the film together. "I am returning to London shortly; when you get back, please telephone me," he said as we parted. Once more I went home, in this case an hotel on 49th Street, singing.

I never saw Korda again until he appeared in the witness box against me in a lawsuit over "The Queen of Spades."

Two years after my Canadian adventure, a film called "The Naked Heart" and purporting to be the story of Maria Chapdelaine was made. Michele Morgan was the star. The film was shot in the Austrian Tyrol and a sledge team of huskies from the Whipsnade Zoo figured creditably. It was shown at the Carlton, taken off after two days and replaced by my favourite W. C. Fields' film, "It's a Gift."

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UNBROKEN BLOSSOMS

"There were two sisters sat in a bower . . ."

I had told Bill Gillette I was going to America to see Korda but the moment I arrived in New York I had to confess to myself that there was somebody else I simply must see, somebody I really looked forward to seeing—and before I telephoned the film magnate who had, as I thought, caused me so much trouble, I telephoned the star who had, from my boyhood days, given me so much pleasure and inspiration : Lillian Gish.

Nine years before, I had been sitting in my room in the Albany flat when Arthur Boys, who had been dining with friends of ours, came in and said casually, "Who do you think is staying with the Parkers?" "I've no idea at all," I said. "Well, guess!" urged Arthur. "Hitler?" I suggested. "No," said Arthur, "Lillian Gish." I sprang up in the greatest excitement, "It *can't* be!" "But it *is*," insisted Arthur, pleased at being the bearer of such sensational news. If he had not been adamant in refusing to disturb his host and hostess at half-past midnight, I would have forced him to telephone the Parkers then and there to ask if I might meet their distinguished visitor. He spoke to them next morning and they amiably invited me to dine the following evening.

I arrived in a state of awe and on being introduced to Lillian Gish became completely tongue-tied—as I usually do when confronted with one of my idols. (Had Tchekov lived in my time and I had met him, I've no doubt I should be dumb-struck to this day.) I could only gaze at Miss Gish. It was incredible : she looked exactly the same as she did in the old days—except for two fine lines under her eyes. Her face was so young, it seemed to me she must have drawn those lines on, in order to play a character part.

I sat beside her at dinner, my mind full of memories. When had I first met Lillian Gish on the screen? Was it in "The Angel of

the Settlement," a two-reeler in which she had saved George Walsh from being lynched? I recalled seeing that with my sister Kay; it had been a gala day for us at the Grand Theatre, Fulham—for Lillian Gish was my favourite star and George Walsh was Kay's best-loved actor, and the other film in the bill had been "The Voice from the Minaret," with Norma Talmadge.

Suddenly I became aware that some contribution to the conversation was expected from me. "Oh, Miss Gish," I said nervously to her, "there's something I remember about one of your earlier films which apparently nobody else does: you were once on a horse rushing to someone *else's* rescue." Miss Gish looked at me as though I must be out of my mind. "I was on a horse . . . rushing to rescue somebody?" she said, incredulously. "Yes," I asserted, "it was called 'The Angel of the Settlement.'" Miss Gish shook her head and said in a gentle but firm voice: "No, no. You must be mistaken. I can't remember any such film or incident."

I was surprised and abashed. I hadn't at that time learned that film stars who have appeared in a great many films always forget the early ones. I did not, in fact, realize this until Robert Helpmann, long afterwards, told me he was afraid he had offended Bebe Daniels: he had said to her, "I remember you, dressed as a moth, dancing on a table in 'Singed Wings.'" Miss Daniels had not remembered having done anything so "idiotic." She had genuinely forgotten the film—and one must hope it is never unearthed and shown on TV as it might rock the millions who enjoy that cosy "Life with the Lyons."

Though my first meeting with Lillian Gish had opened somewhat inauspiciously, it led to her becoming a dear friend of mine. We met a number of times during her stay in London—and I discovered that though I had always thought of her as a film star, she regarded herself as essentially a stage actress. Her mother had been an actress in a touring company and Lillian and her sister Dorothy, as children, had travelled about with her; it was not a very successful touring company and they often went hungry to bed in the stuffy dressing-rooms of fifth-rate theatres because there was not money enough to pay for a meal or lodgings.

The vicissitudes of her childhood had not destroyed Lillian's inborn love of the theatre. The years she had spent making films in Hollywood (from 1910 to 1930, I believe) represented to her no

more than a temporary break in her stage career.

Naturally, during our meetings I argued fervently in favour of the cinema and told her it was my ambition, my dream, to become a film director. She used to smile at me as if I were being rather foolish—but one day she spoke very seriously. Since I had last visited her, she had been to see “After October” and had read several of my other plays. “Rodney,” she said, “I beg of you—don’t waste your time pursuing that dream of yours. You are a *playwright*—why do you want to be a film director instead of writing plays—plays that nobody else could write? There are hundreds of competent film directors and to get to the top in that profession you must be ruthless—you must be tough enough to take hard knocks and keep fighting and fighting. It is not worth it for *you*; you have better things to do—you have your plays to write. Think of the number of plays you could have written in all this time you’ve been *messing about* with films! Don’t you *see . . . ?*”

I saw that she spoke in earnest and I loved her for it. I was, in fact, deeply moved: I muttered out inadequate thanks for her kindness. “Well, think about it, anyway,” she said—and then, to put the conversation on a less emotional level, changed the subject. “I should love to play in a London theatre,” she sighed. I asked what she had been doing before she came over here. “I was playing in New York in Sean O’Casey’s ‘Within the Gates.’ The front-of-house people told me they used to hear dear old ladies coming into the theatre at matinees saying, ‘Oh, I *always* like Lillian Gish, she’s *so* sweet, always so *refined* . . .’—and then, when the poor things sat down and opened their programmes a gasp would go through the whole auditorium. You see, I was down as ‘Lillian Gish—The Young Whore.’”

When I telephoned her in New York, Lillian suggested that as Mary Pickford was giving a little party for a few friends at the Waldorf Astoria that day, I should meet her there at six o’clock. That, I thought, would be charming. Having just arrived from the wilds of Canada, I felt, though, my wardrobe, designed for roughing it in the wild North-West, was scarcely suitable for a party, however small, at the Waldorf Astoria. I couldn’t afford to buy very much, having only my dollar allowance, and anyway I hadn’t the time, as it was already half-past four. I would leave my one good suit to be pressed by the hotel valet service and meantime

could slip out in my rumpled tweeds and at least get a new shirt. No haberdasher in the vicinity of the hotel seemed to understand what I wanted so I journeyed to Fifth Avenue. Here, having browsed luxuriously through a variety of shirtings such as had not been seen in England since before the war, I discovered suddenly that it was later than I had thought. I hastily bought a shirt and, clutching it under my arm, emerged from the shop into the inconceivable chaos of New York's rush hour.

The sidewalk seethed with hot, harassed people, scurrying in all directions, pushing and elbowing each other fiercely and showing such a frenzied determination to escape from Fifth Avenue as quickly as possible that one would have thought an outbreak of bubonic plague in the area had just been announced. There were no taxis to be had—no buses. One stream of fugitives bore me up Fifth Avenue, another swept me down—and it was nearly six o'clock. There was no time to return to my hotel. I would have to forego the freshly pressed suit and fight my way to the Waldorf Astoria as I was. Arriving, panting and more rumpled than ever, I plunged into the gentleman's cloakroom, had a quick wash and changed into my new shirt; to my chagrin, it had the kind of cuffs that demand links, and I was linkless. The friendly attendant comforted me with the information that I could buy a "cheap pair—just junk" at a kiosk in the foyer. With the cheapest pair I could find holding my cuffs decently together, I asked to be conducted to Miss Mary Pickford's party.

A supercilious page flung open a door—revealing thousands and thousands of people, as resplendent and as raucous as macaws, milling about in the ballroom beyond. Dazed and almost deafened, I stood by the doorway feeling lost and hoping that Lillian Gish would find me. At last, looking herself slightly dazed, she did and as we fell on each other's necks she said in my ear, "But I *promise* you, Mary did say just a few friends."

I was fascinated to meet Mary Pickford, though I did not exchange more than a couple of words with her—not, on this occasion, because I was tongue-tied but because she was so busy receiving the hordes of guests who continued to arrive. Her circle of friends was apparently infinite. Unlike Lillian Gish, Mary Pickford had changed a great deal since the old days; she bore no resemblance at all to the ringletted darling who was the world's sweetheart. I knew, of course, that even in her most winsome

period Miss Pickford had been an astute businesswoman : I had not, however, expected her to look so exactly like one. Despite her gracious-hostess smile, the face she presented to her guests was a *business* face; this was doubtless as it should be, for the majority of them appeared to be tycoons from the world of finance. The only person I talked to at this overwhelming party—apart from Lillian—was Dorothy Gish, who looked just as I had remembered her and who still retained the down-to-earth humorous quality that always distinguished her from her ethereal sister.

I went to tea with Lillian and Dorothy the following afternoon. Their New York apartment was charming and they had a Southern butler, straight out of "Gone with the Wind," who appeared to have been with them for years. From the elegance and richness of the furnishings, it was obvious that Lillian and Dorothy had not squandered their money like so many of the early silent stars; having known what poverty was from their youth, they had, in fact, sensibly invested in real estate.

I was shown into the drawing-room where the sisters introduced me to their mother, a beautiful, exquisitely dressed, white-haired old lady whom they obviously adored. This was the actress who had instilled into Lillian her love of the theatre and whose own career had come to a tragic end. In 1925, Lillian, who was starring in "The Scarlet Letter" in Hollywood, heard that her mother was seriously ill in New York. Greatly distressed, she told the director, Victor Seastrom, that she must go to New York at once : he understandingly agreed. When she arrived, Lillian found that her mother had had a stroke which had totally deprived her of the power of speech. Ever since then, Lillian and Dorothy had looked after her; she lived with them, met their guests, was present at all their dinner parties—a gracious, fragile, silent and infinitely touching figure.

On that first visit, while we were taking tea, there seemed to be a mad cocktail party going on in the adjoining dining-room, the door to which was not quite closed. Through the small gap came a babble as of a coven of witches gossiping, with malevolent chuckles and shrieks of eldritch laughter; then one cackling voice could be heard with disconcerting clarity saying, "That Dorothy Gish—she thinks she's an actress! Hee-hee-hee! She's no actress—that Dorothy Gish!" I coughed and rattled my teacup on its saucer and made conversation in a loud voice to drown the flow of

disparagement from next door. Nobody else took the slightest notice of it and eventually the sounds died away; I assumed that the cocktail-takers had drunk themselves into a coma.

One of them, it seemed, came to just as I was leaving. I had telephoned for a cab and when the porter rang back to say he had one waiting for me I said, "I'll be right down." From the next room a horrid, mocking voice echoed, "I'll be right down!" "Who was that?" I asked, unable to contain my curiosity. "Oh, that's our parrot," said Lillian, "you must meet her next time you come. She's very lively for her age—we're told she's well over a hundred—and really a lovely person." Dorothy, who had just entranced me by announcing, "I'll go along with Rodney—I'm meeting Zasu and Gloria," made no comment on the bird; it was conceivable that her affection for the garrulous ancient was more restrained than Lillian's.

At our subsequent meetings, Lillian, probably realizing that my love for the cinema was incurable, allowed herself to be lured into talking of early Hollywood days. I wanted to know how Griffith had got that wonderful close-up of her with frozen eyelashes in the blizzard scene of "Way Down East"; had it been faked? Lillian was indignant. Certainly it had not been faked; the scene had actually been shot in a blizzard, for which they had waited weeks, and not only her eyelashes but all of her had been frozen. "I thought I would die of cold," she said, "but Griffith just kept shouting, 'Give her some more hot tea and carry on.'"

How, I asked, had she done that terrifying scene, in the same picture, where she was on an ice-floe when the ice broke up?

"Why, I just *did* it," said Lillian, looking mildly surprised at the question. "We all *did* things in those days." Recalling the wide use to-day of stand-ins and stunt-men, it seemed to me the modern actor was somewhat lacking in spirit. "But," I said to Lillian, gazing at her with awe, "surely you were risking your life?" "Oh, yes, I suppose so," said she: "as a matter of fact, I was in hospital for six months after that film." One of Griffith's most promising women players, Lillian told me, had actually died in the blizzard scene; Griffith re-cast the part and went on shooting.

Reminiscing about "Birth of a Nation," she told me, with amusement, how one scene, which is still regarded as an outstanding example of screen art, came to be shot. The scene is that which shows the Southerner, Colonel Cameron, returning from the Civil

War to his ravaged home: he looks like a man who has been through hell. Griffith, it appears, was all set to shoot the scene of the colonel, full of high hopes and patriotic zeal, *going off* to the Civil War—but Henry B. Walthall, who was playing Cameron, had been on a terrific bat the night before and turned up at the studio looking ghastly and suffering from an imperial hangover. Griffith immediately changed his plans: "We can't shoot him like that *setting out*," he said. "We'll shoot him *coming back*." And it was done.

"Everything was so different in the old days," said Lillian. "There were no strict union rules then, of course, and everybody was adaptable; we all worked together to make a good film—and we took pride in working together. Films lost so much when talkies came in, I just felt I must leave Hollywood. So in 1930 I came to New York—and played in Jed Harris's production of 'Uncle Vanya.'"

"But surely you did make one talking picture?" I asked. "Wasn't it 'One Romantic Night,' with Rod la Rocque, directed by Paul Stein?"

At the mention of that name, Lillian's face became (as Edmund Pearson described her "Lizzie Borden" face in the play "Nine, Pine St.") "as venomous and implacable as that of the great murderous queen in 'Agamemnon.'" "I can't bear to think of it," she said. We agreed that it was the only stinker she had ever appeared in. She had, of course, not yet made "Duel in the Sun."

Lillian recalled her experiences with Ronald Colman, whom she had discovered as a small-part stage actor. In 1923 she formed her own film company with Henry King and (which may surprise those who think the current fashion to film in Italy is something new), took Colman to Italy to appear with her in her film of "The White Sister" which she made there. In one scene, Colman, cast as the impetuous Italian lover, had to display burning passion as he tried to persuade Lillian, the nun of the title-role, to break her vows. The scene was rehearsed over and over again. Mr. Colman's display of passion was not even lukewarm. It seemed as if his inner self, clad in white flannels and brandishing an embarrassed tennis racquet, held him back, murmuring, "Oh, I say, old man—look here! That sort of thing's all right for foreigners, but I mean to say . . . !" In desperation, Lillian poured him half-a-tumblerful of brandy; in desperation, Mr. Colman drank

it down, neat and in one gulp. A few minutes later, positively incandescent with passion and alcohol, he gave a performance so scorching that, when it reached the screen, women in the audience glowed with responsive rapture and swooned away. Out of the glass of brandy a star was born.

One of the reasons I stayed on in New York (apart from the delight I took in Lillian's company) was that I was trying to get somebody to present my play of "Crime and Punishment" there. The New York Theatre Guild took an option on it and we at once began to discuss casting. I wanted Lillian to play Katerina Ivanovna—the part Edith Evans had played in London—but could not think of an actor to play Raskolnikov. Lillian suggested Burgess Meredith, who was then appearing in "The Playboy of the Western World."

There was a charming story going the rounds at the time. The New York Irish took as great exception to the play as the Irish in Ireland had done when it was first presented, and one night a crowd of Irish toughs gathered at the stage door and mobbed Burgess Meredith and his wife, Paulette Goddard, as they sat in their limousine. The finger of scorn was pointed at Miss Goddard and Mr. Meredith was challenged to "get out and foight." "Don't you do it, Buzz," cried Paulette. "Just open the window and let me hit them with my diamond necklace."

Lillian and I went to see Burgess to ask if there was any possibility of his being able to play in "Crime and Punishment." For the time being, there was none: he planned to go to Dublin when the run of "The Playboy" ended, to appear there with Paulette in "Winterset."

He did go to Dublin—and when I met him a year later he told me the play had not been very enthusiastically received. On the morning following the first night, a chambermaid entered their hotel bedroom bearing a breakfast tray and a bundle of newspapers. She put the newspapers at the foot of the bed and set down the breakfast tray. "There y'are now," she said cosily. "Eat up yer breakfast before ye *desthroy* yerselves reading the notices."

As nothing seemed to be happening about the Theatre Guild production, I wanted to get back to London for a further meeting with Korda—but I could not resist an invitation to visit Claude Rains on his farm in Pennsylvania. It was a magnificent farm,

well stocked with pedigree cattle, and Claud showed me around proudly.

His attitude towards films was entirely different from Lillian's : he would not hear a word against Hollywood. He had struggled for years as an actor in the London theatre (always, as I pointed out, getting wonderful notices) and until nearing middle age had rarely earned more than thirty pounds a week. Then he was invited to Hollywood for "The Invisible Man" and made a name, on his voice alone. Success and wealth followed. He owed all he had and was to Hollywood—and, furthermore, he *enjoyed* making films. I tactfully refrained from mentioning Gabriel Pascal : I had no wish to see venom in another film-star's face.

I was delighted that Claud was happy being a film star—and I was amused to find that he figured in the Agricultural Register as "Claude Rains, Farmer."

On my return to New York, I was told that the Theatre Guild, having been unable to find a leading man, had abandoned the idea of presenting my play. Home I came to London, looking forward optimistically to a meeting with Korda—the meeting that never came off.

"On the liner, coming over . . ."

I travelled back on the *Queen Mary*—no longer a troopship stuffed from stem to stern with war-brides, but reconverted to former glory with a decor in three carefully graded degrees of Corner House splendour. Ivor Novello was aboard, accompanied by Bobbie Andrews.

Bobbie appeared in nearly every play Ivor ever wrote and this alone makes him a fascinating authority on forty years of English theatre history—or at least a thick wedge of it. His conversation is witty and anecdotal and it is always something of a party to meet him.

As for Ivor, he always had a special sort of glamour for me, quite unconnected with "Glamorous Night" and his other rapturous musicals. Being congenitally allergic to musical comedy (except "The Belle of New York"), I had never seen any of them—though this I tactfully concealed from Ivor. I had, however, definitely seen "The Bohemian Girl," Britain's greatest costume drama in six reels, featuring Gladys Cooper and Ivor Novello

(specially augmented orchestra) at the Putney Bridge Kinema-de-Luxe; and at the Balham Picturedrome I'd seen "Carnival," the most daring picture of the century, with Matheson Lang, Hilda Bayley and Ivor Novello—and twice in one week I had paid one-and-three to see Ivor playing opposite Mae Marsh in D. W. Griffith's "The White Rose," at the Shepherd's Bush Pavilion.

He and Bobbie were returning from Hollywood, where they had seen a great deal of Garbo—and all our conversation was of her. Both of them were devotees well the other side idolatry and no Novello fan could have been more enthusiastic about Ivor than he was about the mysterious Swede.

I asked him: "What is the special quality you find in Garbo as a person that makes her so enchanting to you? Can you put it into words?"

"Of course," he replied briskly as though I had asked him how many copies of "We'll Gather Lilac" had been sold to date. "She's so *cosy*."

For a moment I thought that, without my noticing it, the conversation had switched to Sophie Tucker—but when Ivor went on to express his conviction that the star's desire for solitude was not a stunt but arose from a genuine case of almost intolerable shyness, I recognized that this was unlikely to apply to the lady who used to sing, "Gee, How a Fat Girl can Love!"

"Did Garbo actually *tell* you this?" I asked. It appeared not: somehow, he said, no one ever liked to question her openly on the subject. "I did," Bobbie Andrews interrupted. Ivor looked at him in surprise: "What did she say?" he enquired. "Well, you know what she's like," said Bobbie. "If you ask her something she doesn't want to answer she gets out of it by generalizing about life." "So what did she say on this occasion?" Ivor persisted. "She said, 'Life, dear Bobbie, is a pain in the neck.'" "Not very original for such an original," we decided.

Continuing to pester them throughout the voyage for Garbo stories, I learned quite a lot about the tall, Hollywood goddess. She was always happy, it appeared, to lunch or dine with two or three people whom she knew intimately, but the very thought of having to mix in a milling crowd of five would give her a fit of the Swedish willies. So consistent had she always been in this attitude that when, during tea with Ivor and Bobbie, in Hollywood one afternoon, she fell in with a suggestion that they should move on

to a cocktail party at David Niven's, her hosts had to take turns in pinching one another to make sure they were not dreaming.

Off they went, and Ivor made the introductions. "Do you know Miss Garbo?" he said, when David Niven greeted them at the door. Niven expressed surprise that the idol of millions was capable of such a feeble attempt at humour. "*Really*, Ivor . . ." he protested, "don't you know that gag was worked to death before 'The Singing Fool'?" "But it is Miss Garbo," Ivor told him. "And your other friend is the Archbishop of Canterbury, I suppose," said Niven sarcastically: "Well, anyway, I'm delighted you could come." And he turned to the female of the trio.

"This is the last time she'll let us take her out," said Ivor to himself—half expecting Garbo to bolt for home. Instead of this, she raised her lovely yearning face—remote but familiar from countless thousands of close-ups—and, smiling politely, extended her hand. David Niven stretched out his to take it—and performed what must have been the biggest double-take of his career. "Good God!" he said, and fled back to the party.

On one of Garbo's visits to London, Bobbie had had the privilege of showing her around. The first place she wanted to see was Marlborough House. They drove there and dismissed their car with instructions to pick them up later by Buckingham Palace. What, Bobbie wondered, was the peculiar appeal Marlborough House had for Garbo? As they walked to the rear of the house, Garbo said: "Queen Mary and I must have a lot in common. How I envy her *this*." "This?" said Bobbie. "Yes, this," said the star, caressingly patting the unscalable wall about the grounds. She was still gazing with covetous eyes at this guardian of a Queen's privacy, when a car pulled up and disgorged reporters and photographers: turning, Bobbie saw, to his horror, all Fleet Street bearing down on them. Bobbie, momentarily rattled, did not know what to do and waited for a lead from Garbo. Without a glance at the new arrivals, Garbo said to him calmly, "I think we will go now."

They walked towards Buckingham Palace, surrounded by the importunate posse whom Garbo completely ignored. She continued to talk to Bobbie as if they were alone but her conversation became stilted: "How beautiful the trees are . . . They have a great variety of water-birds in this park, do they not? What a solid-looking building the Palace is . . ." Bobbie, a little unnerved at

having to step over crouching cameramen who hurled themselves down in their path, struggled to maintain a flow of small-talk and was full of admiration for the expert way in which Garbo always managed to be looking in the wrong direction whenever a camera clicked. She had so perfected her technique of evasion that when the newspapers came out not one of them had a picture of Garbo—though there were a number of shots of that well-known hat.

The story ended with a touch of irony. Their car mercifully rescued them from the mob and Garbo soon became her cosy self again: she would now like to see Westminster Abbey, she said. They drove there and spent a happy hour wandering, unnoticed. As they emerged, a street photographer approached. Bobbie would have stepped forward to stop him but Garbo held him back. "Nice snap, lady, with the Abbey in the background?" said the man, levelling his camera. Garbo, smiling directly at him, shook her head in refusal and he immediately turned away—not realizing that he had just had the chance of a "scoop" such as any newspaper photographer in the world would have given his ears and eye-teeth to have had.

XV

THE FATAL CONTRACT

"Little did I Dream..."

Before taking off for Canada and the States, I had sacked my secretary and on my return regretted it sadly. I wanted Yvonne there to shield me from the cold horror of a voice on the telephone refusing to put me through to Sir Alexander Korda or to believe that he had actually asked me to get in touch with him and was in fact panting for me to do so. I rang her up and was relieved to find that she was looking for a job. Immediately on her re-appearance at Albany, I set her to work on breaching the Korda ramparts.

She applied herself to the telephone and the following duologue resulted: "Can I speak to Sir Alexander Korda, please?" "Who wants him?" "Mr. Ackland." "*Who?*" "Mr. Ackland." "Mr. Ackram?" "Mr. *Rodney Ackland.*" "Rotni Aklum? How do you spell it?" "R-O-D-N-E-Y A-C-K-L-A-N-D, Mr. Kor—I mean Sir Alexander asked Mr. Ackland to get in touch with him as soon as he gets back from America." A dubious pause. "Just a minute." A prolonged pause. The voice on the wire, when it returns, has acquired a quality inflexible, but with a joyous undertone of "That'll teach you." "Sir Alexander is not available." "Oh . . . Could you tell me what time he *will* be?" "I really couldn't say." "Er . . . will he be free after lunch?" "I couldn't tell you what his movements are." "Er . . . would it be better if I rang tomorrow morning?" "I couldn't say." Oh, well, would you tell him that Mr. Ackland rang? And—er—say it's about 'Maria Chapdelaine.' "About *who*?" "Maria Chapdelaine, it's not a person, it's the name of a film." "Sir Alexander is extremely busy." "Perhaps you could ask him to ring Mr. Ackland back when he has a moment?" "I'll make a note that Mr. Atkins rang."

This dialogue repeated regularly at intervals of about three days soon attained by repetition a sort of Gertrude Stein-like poetry, but

at the end of a fortnight we gave up. I have never discovered what really happened and whether or not my conversation with Korda in New York was all a dream of the type in which middle-class citizens delightedly find themselves on familiar terms with royalty, but the "mystery of Maria Chapdelaine" will always rank in my mind for sheer insolubility rather above that of the *Marie Celeste*.

I tried, unconvincingly enough, to console myself with the reminder that many eminent directors had longer lists of unfulfilled projects in the "Indexes" to their work published by "Sight and Sound" than they had lists of completed pictures and I wanly day-dreamed of a future "Index to the Work of Rodney Ackland," in which "Maria Chapdelaine" would be treated in the same reverent manner—what a loss to Film Art!—as Eisenstein's "Sutter's Gold," von Stroheim's "Walking Down Broadway" and Griffith's "Christ and Napoleon."

But it was a pale and flickering day-dream as projected on my mind's screen and exactly as though I were in a cinema an irritating voice from behind me made the suspension of disbelief difficult to keep up. The voice—sometimes like my own and sometimes like Lillian's, kept nagging away, first in a whisper and then more loudly as it grew bolder, with: "Why don't you face up to the truth that you're not *meant* to be a film director whether eminent or otherwise? Your job is writing plays and if you can't see by now that your misadventures as a would-be director have not been sent merely to try you but to warn you off and send you back to where you belong, which is at your desk with the exercise book containing those notes for at least three plays, which"—the voice took on a mocking myaa-myaa-myaa tone—"you haven't had time to write because you've *been too busy*."

I realized afterwards that it was not my own inner voice I was hearing nor was it an echo of Lillian's warning during tea at the Savoy, but the irritated tones of Fate herself. Having, to no effect, given me several swishes with her cane and an un-ladylike kick she'd come to the conclusion that she wasn't going to have any more nonsense and now, like the Lady of Shallot, "she left the web, she left the loom, she made three paces through the room" and she rolled up her sleeves and got out a sledge-hammer.

Looking back seven years afterwards on what was to follow, I am reminded of a film poster which used to intrigue me in the magical days of my schoolboy filmgoing. The picture advertised

was "ENLIGHTEN THY DAUGHTER. PATHE GOLD ROOSTER DRAMA IN SIX PARTS. FOR ADULTS ONLY." Divided horizontally, the placard showed in its upper half a girl in sailor-blouse and tam o'shanter getting ecstatically windswept on a hilltop in a heatwave while all unbeknownst to her a vulture hovered overhead. (I don't think the vulture could actually have worn a waxed moustache and a monocle but in my mind's eye at any rate it gives that impression.)

Below this was a morbid scene of the same heroine crouching at the bottom of a precipice with some reptiles and rats. In such company and without her tam, she looked as different from her former sunny self as the "Dear Little Doll" of Kingsley's poem after—in the penultimate stanza—it had been trodden on by a cow. A caption explained: FROM THE HEIGHTS OF HAPPINESS TO THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR.

Secure in my conviction of the truth of the theory which, during "Dangerous Moonlight," it may be remembered, I discussed with Brian Hurst and Terence Young, that happiness is only interesting to audiences—and presumably to readers—when it is threatened, I feel few misgivings in starting off to describe my period on "The Heights of Happiness," for the reader may be assured of a nice juicy disaster—the first boulder of a landslide—before many pages have been turned.

I am not certain when I first met Anatole de Grunwald. We must, I suppose, have sometimes passed the time of day or night after meetings of the Screenwriters' Association, but my first real encounter with him was in Zwemmer's Charing Cross Road bookshop a month or two before "Crime and Punishment" went into rehearsal. I was having a free read of a too expensive book on Yoga, trying to memorize instructions on how I might obtain Enlightenment by swallowing my tongue and ceasing to breathe when, all unbeknownst, Mr. de Grunwald came and stood beside me. "Hullo, Rodney, what are you doing?" a dark-grey mellifluous voice said.

I started guiltily, feeling caught out in having a free read, and turning, saw a long pallid face, not without a certain fading beauty, decorated with murky eye-smudges. "Oh, hullo, I—I'm doing—Oh, you know, the usual M.O.I. films," I said quickly, scratching about in my mind for an answer calculated to stun, as I knew that such a question in theatrical and film language means simply:

"How successful are you being?" "I—as a matter of fact I'm going to start rehearsals fairly soon," I continued, lighting on a suitably stunning answer, which was luckily true—"a dramatization of 'Crime and Punishment.' I've made it in *one set* incidentally, that gigantic novel!—God knows how I did it but I did. We're opening at the New with John and Edith. And Alec Clunes is putting on a comedy of mine at the Arts, so what with *one thing and another . . .*" The "*dots*" implying that if he wanted to know what I was doing, I was doing fine.

Soon after "Crime and Pun." (as it was known in the profession) had had a successful first night, Tolly approached me with a proposition. A screenwriter himself, he had stepped himself up into the producer class by way of that enigmatic credit, "Associate Producer," the meaning of which differs with every film on which it appears, and having distinguished himself with "The Way to the Stars," now proposed a group-story to be called "Bond Street." The writing of its six more or less inter-related episodes was to be apportioned between Tolly, Terence Rattigan and me.

By the time I came back from my American trip I'd completed my two episodes and was delighted with them. The shorter one concerned a South Kensington old lady who, after a "painful interview" with her Bond Street bank manager (one of the easiest scenes I've ever written), had to admit that she was completely penniless; lost and terrified, "not liking" to go back to her South Ken, boarding house where she hadn't paid the rent, she wandered helplessly about Bond Street all day, getting herself involved in the other episodes and finishing up by accosting mink-coated ladies and asking them to lend her a fiver. (This was based on the true story of a Mrs. Whipple, who used to do sewing for me.)

The longer and more important story was a cautionary tale about one of the mink-coated ladies—a real one, not a tart—who, more than old enough to know better, lives a whirling life based on Bond Street values and in spite of heart specialist's warnings, flogs herself up and down the street from Elizabeth Arden's to Asprey's, from Asprey's to Cartier's and the Embassy club for lunch (sorry, luncheon—*pace* Miss Mitford) and so on throughout the day and night until, after a delightful supper at Churchill's, she collapses on the pavement. Dying, she notices for the first time in years, the stars in the firmament, concludes that they're a not very amusing ceiling decoration invented by the man who's

doing up her flat and decides to have them painted out.

Tolly accepted the story of the South Ken. lady with no more than a few amendments. It was cast with my favourite actress (after Lillian Gish and Peggy Ashcroft), Mary Jerrold, in the leading role, was shot in every detail when "Bond Street" went on the floor—and then cut out of the picture. The other story didn't get as far as that. A conference was called with de Grunwald, Gordon Parry (the director), and myself. They wouldn't have at any price the tale of the poor little old rich girl whirling to her death in Bond Street, with slightly bent knees under her mink, because there was no "heart interest in it."

We all sat brooding, trying to think up a story with heart-interest. Mothers, of course, would have to come into it, and something about hospitals and, for real sure-fire stuff, a spot of blindness never came amiss. Having, myself, been guilty of a blind heroine in "Strange Orchestra," not to mention additional dialogue for Margaret Lockwood or Stewart Granger, when one—or was it both?—of them went blind in "Love Story," I could consider myself an expert on this affliction as a source of entertainment. But it was Gordon Parry who finally hit on an idea for combining all three heart-interest ingredients: blindness, hospitals and mothers. Reader, I wrote it.

In the completed film Adrienne Allen appeared as a mother whose son had been blinded, while Kathleen Harrison played another mother whose daughter was in hospital. My future was beginning to take on the glittering aspect of an infinitely prolonged theatrical finale with scenes of enthronement and apotheosis; my past—or at least, some incidents in it—as illuminated by present happenings, could now be viewed, like a series of transformation scenes, in a more fascinating light and my dearest ambition having reached its last-but-one gasp, now sprang into confident life centre stage, fully armed and rearing to go like the Demon King through a trap.

Life was becoming "as good as a pantomime"—a spectacular production on (very thin) ice. Not only was a contract being drawn up for me to direct a film based on Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades," but "Crime and Pun." was at last to be presented in New York (by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea, the Theatre Guild contract having lapsed), and I was to go out there in September to assist at rehearsals with all expenses paid. Fyodor

Komisarjevsky was to direct the play and although, having worked for him as a very small-part actor, I couldn't stand him any more than he could stand my efforts to build my part into a Brilliant Cameo, I had seen Komis's production of "The Three Sisters" when I was seventeen and at the end had wandered out of the theatre and got on to a number nine bus (going the wrong way), blinded by beauty, pity, sorrow, poetry, stage technique and an implacable ambition to become a playwright.

This production of Tchekov, in fact acted as a starting pistol for my entrance into the Caucas-race of playwrights ("All have lost and none shall have prizes," said the Inland Revenue Assessor), in the same way that "Orphans of the Storm" had electrified me into entering the combined hurdle-sack-and-egg-and-spoon-race of film direction. "Little did I dream when I went down to the Barnes Theatre for that never-to-be-forgotten experience, that one day..."

Everything seemed to be working out into a series of attractive and neatly executed designs in bright colours, all stamped with the trade mark of indefatigable Fate. "Little did I dream..." when I sat, a thirteen-year-old schoolboy, in the upper circle of the Scala, gasping at my first revelation of the Cinema as Art and dropping tear-stained chocolates on to the lady in the beige coat, "that one day..." I should be sitting, a successful dramatist soon to embark on directing his first screen epic, in the self-same seat watching the self-same film with a musical accompaniment arranged by myself, (Panatrophe, I'm afraid—the Film Society couldn't keep up with the price of orchestras and the orchestras had seldom kept up with the films) and nothing missing but the unfortunate lady and the chocolates.

In this case, I had given Fate some assistance. As chairman of the Film Society I'd made a point of showing "Orphans of the Storm" during our second season, and before the show I tried out every seat in the upper circle in turn until I hit on what seemed to be the right one.

"Little did I dream..." Once, as a member of a furtive *avant garde* film society in the late 'twenties, I lay on the floor of a Bloomsbury sitting-room and watched Eisenstein's "Ten Days That Shook The World" (banned by the British Government), projected on the ceiling—and slunk out afterwards feeling like an 1890 Nihilist with a Christmas pudding bomb in his pocket.



"GIVE HER SOME MORE HOT TEA!"

But it didn't prevent six months in hospital : Lillian Gish in
"Way Down East"



"ALMOST TOO VITAL FOR BALHAM"
Pola Negri as the Dubarry in "Passion"



"AND THE SWISS RIGHTS TOO?"
Yvette Guilbert as Martha in the UFA production of "Faust"

Little indeed did I dream that one day . . . I would assist at the presentation of the same Soviet film—now in the lending library of the British Film Institute—at the Scala Theatre (not on the ceiling) and emerge into Charlotte Street feeling like an imperialist-fascist-lackey with a copy of the *Recorder* in my pocket because the picture had now been banned by the *Russian* Government.

While rounding off these dainty little designs of Fate I was, of course, laying the groundwork for several more, most of which turned out to be larger, more complicated and not at all dainty. Arthur had become friendly with de Grunwald while I was in the States and had brought him the idea of making "The Queen of Spades": Tolly to produce, Arthur and I to write the script, Oliver Messel to design the sets and costumes, and the direction to be by me.

With a knowledge of the period both wide and deep, and a profound feeling for the Pushkin story as a film—which in every sense was his "baby," Arthur would be associate producer. In this case, the ambiguous "credit" meant his supervising the picture in all its stages to ensure that as far as possible it wouldn't fall below our original conception. This was that we should not make merely a transcription of the story but try to create on the screen an evocation of Byronism, of Pushkinism, in fact a distillation of the whole Romantic Period in the Arts.

During the "Bond Street" script conferences, a spirit of amity prevailed. No objection was raised to my disappearing to America for eight weeks before "The Queen of Spades" went on the floor. I signed a contract with World Screenplays—one of Tolly's production companies—to write the script in collaboration with Arthur Boys for two thousand pounds and to direct it for a further two thousand.

After the signing ceremony we all congratulated each other on forming an ideal "team." Admirers of each other's work, as well as of our integrity, culture, sense of humour and, by implication at least, looks and bank balances, we would further each other's careers, enhance each other's reputations and establish the combined names of Ackland-de-Grunwald-Boys as a synonym for Film Art. "Little did I dream . . ."

But the upper part of the poster must come first.

John Gielgud had nearly but not quite been persuaded to play Raskolnikoff in America, but in case he should fall through I took

advantage of Burgess Meredith's being in London to find out what his plans were. At a tumultuous party given by himself and Paulette Goddard I managed to have a few words with him. I was at Olwen Vaughan's "Petit Club Français" in St. James's Place. Film stars, gate crashers and club members were jammed together like rush-hour passengers in a tube during a bus strike. So great was the crush that poor Olwen, immobilized, pinioned as it were by the guests about her, had to stand helplessly by, incapable of intervening, and like the mother in "Therese Raquin," to express anguish of soul only by her eyes while ladies on whom she'd never set them before squeezed out of the party with bottles of Scotch and of champagne ill-concealed beneath their mink.

This was hardly the time or place to discuss business with the host and, having heard his story of the Dublin reception of "Winterset," I realized Burgess may have felt the need of a few months to build himself up again before risking another pre-breakfast demolition. The problem of who would play Raskolnikoff was solved for me by John Gielgud's deciding to do it after all.

A few days before I set sail for America, Tolly suggested that as Arthur and I were busy, it might be a good idea if he were to cut the "Queen of Spades" script which we had now completed. There was no question but that it was too long and we agreed. He made the cuts in a first-rate professional manner and, delighted at being saved several hours of boring work, we thanked him for his kindness.

Controversy unhappily arose over whether or not he should be given a screenwriting credit for his work. Arthur and I, who felt there was no reason why he should, attempted to laugh off the idea—but it couldn't be laughed off, and somehow, before we could get a grip of the situation, we were all at odds with each other.

It didn't seem possible that we were the same three people, the mutually-admiring team. When at last Arthur and I suggested that the best solution would be for the matter to be put up to the Screenwriters' Association for arbitration, Tolly, with a muttered good-night, stalked off in a silence pregnant with disapproval. I saw him to the door and I couldn't resist slamming it.

Immediately there flashed into my mind a minatory sub-title from "Orphans of the Storm." In the character of Henriette Girard, Lillian had put up Monte Blue as Danton for the night in

her 1789 bed-sitter after he'd been injured in a street brawl; Robespierre had peeked in and Lillian had slammed the door in his face just too late to stop him from drawing his own conclusions. Always a one for pointing out how little Lillian dreamed in the early reels what was coming to her in the way of guillotines, heart-breaks, ice-floes, bereavements, beatings to death and forced marriages to mullatoes before many more reels were up, Griffith commented in the ensuing caption: "Only the slam of a door—but it would bring Henriette within the shadow of the Gates of Death." This particular slam—of the door of A.12 Albany, Piccadilly—was to bring me within the shadow of the law courts, plant me firmly in the outer darkness beyond Denham, Elstree and Pinewood where not even a faint gleam from Shepperton or Twickenham could lighten the gloom.

Two days later I was off on the Queen Elizabeth rejoicing in the knowledge that, with my directorial contract signed, nothing could really stop me, that there would probably be reporters waiting to interview me when we docked, that there were no fifteen-hundred Canadian war-brides on the trip, and that Pola Negri was reputed to be living at the Town House on East 38th Street, a reasonably luxurious hotel which I had already cabled to book myself a room.

"At Sea with Roland Young—and Fate"

On the way over I used to see, whenever I entered the bar, a solitary figure sitting at a table for two. I recognized him as Roland Young. He was returning to America after playing in the Terence Rattigan episode of "Bond Street." He never spoke to anyone but the barman and then only to order another drink. His prim, sad-humorous expression never altered. Once I heard a gregarious male passenger approach him and pulling out the other chair at Mr. Young's table, ask: "O.K. if I sit with you?" "No," said Mr. Young. He didn't even look up to see what the passenger was like and the wretched man, smiling convivially, had half-lowered himself into the chair before the meaning of the word penetrated. He did a technically perfect double-take, straightened out like a plucked bowstring so that you could almost hear the whang! and took himself off double-quick.

Before this I myself had sometimes toyed with the idea of accost-

ing Mr. Young. "Excuse me, but I'm Rodney Ackland," I would have said, "I—er—I've been working on 'Bond Street' too—I hear your episode turned out wonderfully—I—er—how did you get on with Gordon Parry?—er—Tolly tells me you've been recording a new radio serial for the B.B.C.—er—I'm sure we must have a great many mutual friends . . . Would you care to have a drink with me?" I thanked God for whatever unexpected slap or unfeeling laugh in my forgotten infancy had been responsible for the childish terror of rebuffs I still suffered from, but which had saved me on this occasion from a real classic.

I could just see the unsociable Mr. Young's jaw snapping on that inevitable "No!" his face, as with this lethal pronouncement he destroyed my tenderly-nursed sense of being "the famous film-director and dramatist," impassive as a chameleon when it swallowed down a fly. I learned afterwards that Roland Young only liked people he already liked.

"Little did I dream . . ." that Roland Young's last evening in London before boarding the *Queen Elizabeth* was spent with my future wife, Mab Poole, Frederick Lonsdale's daughter, listening to a complete recording of her radio serial in which he starred. I learned afterwards that Mabbie laughed so much at her own lines and Roland gave such appreciative and continual guffaws at his own performance that B.B.C. officials looked down their noses and raised, with slight shrugs, their eyebrows, concluding that Mrs. Poole and Mr. Young must either have not been to public schools or be not quite right in their heads. The voyage ended without my ever having spoken to Roland Young.

He died a year or two later without having had the pleasure of my acquaintance. I asked my wife recently whether she thought perhaps he'd taken a particular dislike to the man who tried to sit at his table, and whether if I'd gone up to him as I'd wanted to, he might have welcomed me with open arms? "Oh, no, he wouldn't," Mabbie said, "He'd have been *furious*!"

XVI

THE UPPER HALF OF THE POSTER

"Versailles before the Tumbrils..."

Soon after my arrival I found out that Pola Negri was indubitably staying at the Town House. She was on the floor above me in an exactly similar room at eight-dollars-fifty a day which is cheap for New York. It wasn't long before I got myself introduced to a man who sometimes acted as Miss Negri's manager, a refugee from Austria who specialized in handling once-famous stars from Middle Europe.

He was always trying to organize schemes to put them back on top and sometimes in the guise of impressario would present one of them in a recital or one-man show at a concert hall. I had missed his last show by a few days he told me, producing a copy of the *Herald Tribune*, and pointing to a concert hall advertisement in which his name in block capitals figured at the top. "What a pity I missed it!" I said politely, but he told me it didn't make any difference as the star who was billed to appear hadn't turned up and he'd had to give the audience their money back.

We were talking in an enormous bar on "Pen" station where, in between being a manager and impressario, he worked as barman. Later in the evening he had a couple of hours off and we went to a party on Park Avenue where Pola was expected. The hostess was married to a rich industrialist and lived in a four-story house squeezed between skyscrapers, reminding me in its anachronism of the house where the mad scientist lived in "Metropolis." On arrival, we were shown into a large room which was also something of an anachronism—a library. On the bookshelves there were no books—only bottles. Bottles of Scotch, Bourbon, Brandy, Rum, Rye and Gin—the equivalent, I suppose, of run-of-the-mill books while esoteric liqueurs and vintage brandies took the place of leather bound tomes and "volumes de

luxé." Waiting for Pola's entrance, I remembered the electrifying effect of her first appearance on British screens in 1923. As Madame du Barry in a UFA film directed by Lubitsch (the British distributors with their usual inspiration called it "Passion"), she had made the screen of Pykes Picture House, Balham—where I'd slunk in to see it instead of going to football—seem as though at any moment it would be torn across like a ship's sail in a tempest with the force of her vital personality.

I wondered if Pola would make the same sort of shattering impact in the flesh (and a quarter-of-a-century later) and reflected that as La Negri was rather the type to put on weight and as film stars nearly always turn out to be only four feet high when you meet them, I'd better be prepared for a cosy little body like the foreign ladies who used to annoy Mother by jumping the fish queues during the war. The answer to these forebodings came in no uncertain manner.

The door burst open as though a tornado had hit the house, the bottles clinked and rattled on the shelves, everybody sprang up, the parrot house noises of the party redoubled in volume and foreignness, confusion became pandemonium, followed by a sudden silence and all at once, there at the grand piano, was Pola thumping away at a gipsy love song—not at all like "Zigcuner-Zigeuner"—and singing in Polish and a wonderful husky X-certificate voice. She was considerably more than four feet high and if she had, perhaps, put on an extra pound or two it would only need a couple of days on the milk and banana diet to fix that. After the sixth gipsy love song the hostess indicated that she had delighted us long enough, and Pola quit the piano after giving us two or three more songs with an additional amount of gipsy abandon.

We were introduced and as soon as she discovered my nationality Miss Negri asked me if, as soon as I returned to London, I would find out whether her gramophone records were popular there. This I treacherously promised to do, in order to get quickly on to the sort of conversation I was longing for.

"Oh, Miss Negri," I said, cutting short her discourse on the art of gramophone recording, "I can't tell you what this meeting means to me. There are three actresses I've worshipped since I was a boy, Lillian Gish, Greta Garbo and you." Pola's face froze, and turning away she went back to the piano and sang another

gipsy love song. It seemed that she had never heard either of Greta Garbo or Lillian Gish.

At a later stage of the party we were reconciled and her manager came up with a suggestion that I should write for her a modern version of "Madame X" in which she could make a come-back. In spite of remembering a fascinating still of Pauline Frederick in this role, showing her dishevelled at a cafe table staring at a glass of absinthe, with the caption, "On the road to God knows where," I felt I'd had enough of adaptations.

Nevertheless, I saw quite a lot of Pola during the following week, and we even appeared in one of the more nauseating gossip columns as "Silent film star, Pola Negri, and British playwright Rodney Ackland are the latest twosome d'amour round town." It would have been more correct to call it a twosome de nostalgie for, guided by myself, our conversation was almost exclusively of Pola's great days before Hitler's war when she was the most dynamic vedette in Hollywood. Present lack of interest in her on the part of film producers she attributed to a gossip-mongering rumour that she had been Hitler's mistress. "But you weren't, were you?" I enquired. "My dear, of course not," said Pola with airy scorn, "I never even met the man."

She had a blind and uncritical admiration of her own genius in the blaze of which her sense of humour evaporated like a dew-drop on a million-watt arc lamp. This idiosyncrasy, I have noticed, is one to which stars who made their name in Germany are particularly prone. I was already familiar with it through having worked on various occasions with Richard Tauber, Lucie Mannheim and Anton Walbrook, all of whom, like Miss Negri, seemed to be their own most adoring fans. But instead of being insufferable—as it undoubtedly would be if the actors concerned were British—this particularly European brand of professional "conceit" is so straightforward, honest, and, paradoxically unpretentious that one is delighted by it instead of bored. Dining at the Town House one day towards the end of rehearsal, by which time I had dragged Pola through her career at UFA ("Passion," "Mad Love" and "The Flame of Paris") to her Hollywood triumphs ("Bella Donna," "Forbidden Paradise" and "Shadows of Paris"), we reached at last the talking period and her Austrian-made film "Mazurka," which I had seen at the Curzon. This was yet another version of the sure-fire "heart-interest" legend about a tainted

lady* who, finding her daughter about to give All to a Roue who, some years previously, had taken her own All under false pretences, puts a lady's size revolver in her beadwork handbag and shoots him down without removing her gloves.

"My dear, you remember that scene when I was in the dock . . ." Pola reminded me, her eyes darkening in the shadow of the Gates of Death. "Of course, I do. I can never forget it." "You remember how my face shows no sign except just a hint—a suggestion—of a trembling of the lips—and my hand goes up with a movement like this to hide it?" She was acting it for me and I noticed several people looking at us askance and whispering together, wondering what outrageous thing I could have said to so upset Miss Negri.

"You remember that scene?" Pola asked again when she'd finished re-performing it. "Of course I do!" I assured her with genuine enthusiasm—and I *did* remember it—"I remember thinking at the time 'what a magnificent piece of acting.'" "Magnificent?" said Pola and she sounded rather irritated, "Magnificent? That was the greatest piece of acting that has even been seen on the screen." Maybe so. Anyway Pola is a superb actress.

With Gielgud as Raskolnikoff, Lillian Gish as Katerina Ivanovna, and Vladimir Sokoloff as Porfiri Petrovich there were, meanwhile, some great pieces of acting coming along on the stage of the National Theatre where "Crime and Pun." was to be presented. Sokoloff I had admired as an actor since his appearance in G. W. Pabst's "The Love of Jeanne Ney," in 1927. This was a wonderfully true, touching and deeply-felt tale of faithful lovers who, torn apart by the Russian Revolution, are re-united in Paris only to be separated once again by the nasty tricks played on them by a very unbeautiful spy played by Fritz Rasp.

The title of this masterpiece (as it is acknowledged to be) is explicit and exact. It states precisely what the film is about, which is the *love* of Jeanne Ney—a love literally unique in the history of film titles, singular only because it isn't plural. The one dirt-track minds of Wardour Street might have been expected to bring it down to their level by nothing more than the addition of an "s," but this wasn't bad enough for them and the picture was announced as "Lusts of the Flesh." Poor Jeanne, her brave love story wasn't

* "I am a tainted woman, but my wrongs are my own, and I must bear them alone." The "Mum" in "A Woman of No Importance."

even permitted the comparative dignity of being called "*A Lust of the Flesh*."

Thank God, however, there was such an outcry from the more intelligent film critics that, believe it or not, Wardour Street climbed down and reverted to the real title. His role in "*Jeanne Ney*" was the only example of Sokoloff's work I knew, but as I'd seen the film at least twelve times—most recently in our opening season of the New London Film Society—it was like meeting an old friend when we were introduced at rehearsals.

Readers who know the film will recall the sympathetic little Bolshevik soldier who tries to console Jeanne after the death of her papa by offering the grief-stricken girl what appears to be a kipper. With his wonderfully humorous, pale, crinkled-up Russian face, Sokoloff himself looks rather like a wartime kipper with the dye washed out, and slight and wiry as he is, I found it difficult to imagine anyone less like Peter Ustinov who had been cast for the part in London because he seemed physically right. But "*What a performance!*" as Sid Field used to say. Sokoloff's knowledge, understanding, and expression of every nuance in the character of Porfiri Petrovich, the examining magistrate, was miraculous and his long cat-and-mouse scenes with Gielgud something to write home about if I'd found the time.

He was an old Moscow Art Theatre boy, both before and after the Revolution, and I asked him how he'd managed to get out of the country and—the inevitable question—what it felt like for an artist as individual as himself to work under a State dictatorship. He told me he hadn't got along too badly until an incident following his performance as the King in "*Hamlet*." The morning after the first night he was hauled on the carpet before the Bolshoi Theatre director. I don't know if they asked him "*who he thought he was,*" but they certainly asked him what he thought he was doing on the stage the previous night. Sokoloff said he thought he was playing the King in "*Hamlet*." Then he thought wrong, they told him! He had given a disgraceful exhibition which was nothing less than a subversive attempt to feed Imperialist-Fascist Poison to the Masses and put Ideas into their Heads.

He had played the King as if Claudius were a human being, they went on. Surely he ought to know by now as that great exponent of Socialist Realism, the author of "*Hamlet*," knew, that kings bore as much resemblance to human beings as ikons or

kulaks, and he'd better have a quick brainwash and brush up his Marx before treading the Bolshoi Theatre boards again. But he never did tread them again. He went straight home, pocketed a few belongings, and by the time his delighted understudy made a kingly first entrance that night (probably on a pogo-stick along a tightrope as this was in Constructivist Theatre Days), was already on his way from the Soviet fire to the Hollywood frying pan.

Not taking the metaphor too seriously, there does appear to be one great difference, insofar as it affects an actor's work, between the dictatorship of the Party Line and that of the Hay's Office; in Hollywood you are at least permitted to enact your roles more or less in the way that seems right to you without being hauled on to the carpet—they simply edit your part afterwards and make it into anything they like—often something completely different—in the cutting room.

Before leaving for America I had attended a preview of "Duel in the Sun," given by its sponsors to the British Film Academy. At the end there was a dumbfounded silence. Film academicians began to leave as hastily as possible, making polite murmurs to their bewildered hosts who just couldn't take in, after they'd shown us a movie costing so many million dollars, that a nauseating time had been had by all.

Until then I had always been baffled by the expression, "an obscene libel," the police court term to describe works of literature when books are banned during periodical outbreaks of *pudeur anglais*. It had seemed particularly inappropriate to "Lady Chatterley's Lover," "The Well of Loneliness" and other imaginative expositions of the love between human beings. But in this technicoloured epic of "toughness" with its climax of a man and woman plugging bullet holes in each other, and, covered in tomato sauce gore, attempting to make love before dying of their mutually-inflicted wounds one saw what the phrase "an obscene libel" could mean.

Indeed, the case of "Duel in the Sun," which depicted sadism and violence as "love" and reduced the relationship between men and women to the level of those sex-obsessed village idiots beloved by film distributors, one saw all too clearly. The love between human beings was Obscenely Libelled, which is, perhaps, what the Hays Office has been aiming at all the time.

"Lust in the Dust" was the title this picture came to be known

by. And reader, Lillian was in it. She played the Mother, opposite Walter Huston, and had a Big Death Scene and her part didn't make sense at all. I've never seen Lillian not make sense on the screen before—except in Mad scenes and then, of course, she made sense dramatically. I asked her what had gone wrong. "Of course I didn't make sense in that film as it was shown," she said, "there didn't seem any reason for acting the way I did in most of the sequences. I must have seemed like a raving lunatic. You see, I was supposed to be a secret drinker, but all the scenes where I went up to my room and drank half-a-bottle of Bourbon before re-appearing as a correct Southern hostess, were cut."

Seeing her performance in retrospect, her unaccountable manner of playing, full of baffling hesitations and oddities, now made sense; she was supposed to be half tipsy. "But the secret drinking scenes were the clue to your whole character!" I exclaimed, "Why on earth were they cut? Was it because the film was too long?" "No, that had nothing to do with it," Lillian said, "it was because the Hays Office didn't approve of them."

About a week before "Crime and Pun." opened, I was lunching at the Algonquin with a man who looked like a film executive, the weight of whose long cigar threatened at any moment to overbalance him; this was Joe Vogel (as I will call him), who had attached himself to me as "agent" or "manager" or "accountant"—or anything I liked to call him so long as my dollar royalties from "Crime and Pun." passed through his hands. We stopped for a moment at a table where a square-faced young man, rather like Billy Graham, but with a more open countenance and dark, luxuriant Harlene hair drill tresses, was sitting. Vogel introduced him as Cornel Wilde, and me as "the British playwright," and the two of us conversed for as long as it took our smiles to fade.

"Cornel was crazy to play the stoddent in 'Crime and Punishment,'" Vogel told me as soon as we sat down. "You shoulda had him instead a this Gielgud—you wanna *name* in the cast that'll pull them in and make you a lotta dollars. Yeah, you'dda got something there with Cornel in the part." I thought Mr. Wilde looked more like a beautiful baseball player or the heartbreaker of a bomber squadron stationed in Sculthorpe, than like poor, tortured Raskolnikoff, and I said so. "Well, they don't go for that tortured stuff in the States," Vogel admonished. "Much better you'd had an athletic-type guy like Cornel and cut out the torture."

I pointed out that it was too late in the day to ask Gielgud to retire from the play in favour of Cornel Wilde, and we changed the conversation to British Currency Regulations, a subject on which I supposed Vogel to be more knowledgeable.

The following February when I was back in London and "Crime and Punishment" was closing after a run of only ten weeks, Vogel phoned me from New York. I asked him whether he thought the play was folding so unexpectedly because of the great blizzard which had hit New York soon after the opening (and remained hitting it), or whether it was simply because New Yorkers didn't like the piece. Vogel said they liked the piece okay if only we'd cut down on the torture by having an athletic type guy in the part of the student, but I wasn't to worry as he had arranged to take over the whole show and transfer it to another theatre with Cornel Wilde replacing Gielgud in the lead. Wilde was all signed up to do this except he insisted his wife must replace Dolly Haas in the part of Sonya and would I cable immediately agreeing to the transfer and the change of cast.

I saw no objection as long as I never had to witness this surrealist version of the play and I sent the cable. Vogel said he was writing me the full details but a week passed and no letter came. I put through a call to his secretary who told me that just as Mr. Vogel took out his pen to sign the contract for taking over "Crime and Punishment" he had been struck with a nervous breakdown and taken to a nursing home. She added that he was likely to remain there for three months.

The opening of "Crime and Pun." seemed to be the Theatre Event of the Season, Mother had flown over for the first night and I'd taken her shopping at Macey's with the glorious unnecessary of clothes coupons, interviews about my future activities as a film director appeared in the Press, and on top of the world as I consciously felt, it all seemed to be no more than a glittering overture to my coming triumph with "The Queen of Spades." The only cloud on the horizon was no bigger than a man's handwriting.

Arthur wrote from London of an increasing deterioration in the relationship between himself and Grunwald. His attempts to improve it were decidedly unilateral as whenever he tried, as associate producer, to see Tolly, Tolly was not available. Arthur would sit in the World Screenplay offices waiting and waiting and no telephone call would come, no message and, as though he were

the leading actor in a rather artistic final sequence to a sensitively directed film, the shadows of dusk would gather round him, the staff would go home, the cleaners would come in and start cleaning and then they'd say they'd got to lock up and Arthur would gather his papers together and go out into the night. And the whole sequence would be repeated about twice a week.

By this time Arthur did not feel at all as if he were playing in a sensitively directed final scene. His feelings were becoming more like those of the character in "Bleak House," who blows up from internal combustion.

I telephoned from New York and begged him for God's sake to try and avoid the explosion; to compromise, to play along with Tolly until we'd finished the film. Arthur told me not to waste the expensive transatlantic minutes because he'd had the explosion anyway and—at this moment his voice faded out, there was a succession of noises that made one think of comets careering in outer space, then Arthur's voice returned for a moment, clear and urgent as he managed to get four words in edgeways between comets: "I'll write—I'll write!" After this, dead silence and then the operator came on and said that owing to weather conditions the transatlantic service was temporarily discontinued.

I decided to take a bright view of what Arthur had told me. The explosion with Tolly would have cleared the air and I would arrive home after the New York triumph of "Crime and Pun." to find Boys and de Grunwald "bosoms" again and the "stupid quarrel" seen in its proper perspective as merely a triumvirates' tiff. But, the pride before the fall, Versailles before the tumbrils; before the cruel awakening, the dream—the glittering dream—of childhood dreams fulfilled. Came the first night. Almost more than success for myself I wanted a thumping great success for Lillian as Katerina Ivanovna. I wanted to stretch back into the past and give an encouraging pat on the shoulder to myself as I was when at fourteen, I used, every morning of a particular Monday to Saturday, sneak out of the house with two or three books belonging to my unsuspecting father and sell them for ninepence in order to go on six consecutive afternoons to the Red Hall, Walham Green and see "The White Sister," featuring Lillian Gish. AN INSPIRATION PICTURE. Straight from the Tivoli Theatre, London. ENORMOUS SUCCESS.

In the original production of "Crime and Pun.," Edith Evans

as Katerina went mad in the last act. But this happened strictly off-stage and the public exhibition Katerina makes of herself, singing and dancing in the streets and beating time with a frying pan, is merely described by one of the minor characters.

Now, discarding the rules of Classic Drama by which the worst horrors must be kept no nearer centre stage than the wings, I rewrote and reconstructed that last act. I wanted to give Lillian an opportunity to display her unique gifts in something she can do better than any actress I have ever seen, and that is to go raving mad in full view of the audience. I had seen her going mad with fear in "Broken Blossoms," crazed with grief in "Hearts of the World," frenzied with terror in "Orphans of the Storm," insane with shock in "The White Sister," demented with nerves in "The Wind," and practically have locomotor ataxia in "The Birth of a Nation." In addition, she had been a sensational Ophelia in Gielgud's American production of "Hamlet," startling the critics by playing the mad scene with her hands and arms thrust into stockings as though they were gloves. Lillian once told me that towards the end of the silent days she felt she had exhausted every possibility of what can be done with the human face (her own, of course), as a means of expression. A refresher course seemed necessary and off went Lillian to a lunatic asylum where she spent a useful but horrifying day studying the inmates to see what they did with their faces. As Dostoevsky's Katerina, I now gave her a Mad scene to end all mad scenes, a combination of all the mad scenes she had ever played rolled into one—and a bit more.

Before the eyes of the first night audience at the National, she went mad with rage, grief, pain, fear, hatred, hunger, mother-love and snobbism. In a battered straw hat with moth-eaten ribbons, laughing, weeping, coughing blood, croaking threats and imprecations, singing snatches of old songs, dancing, slapping her terrified infants and giving them French lessons she exited beating a frying pan and as I'd hoped and expected got the most tremendous and prolonged round I've ever heard during the action of a straight play.

Life was worth living. The reception at curtain call was warm enough for me to allow myself the indulgence of thinking that as long as the notices were good we'd got a hit. The notices proved not only good enough to encourage me in this idea, but to make my dream-fulfilment complete, many of them said Miss Gish

gave her greatest performance in her greatest role to date. So that was that. I made my plane reservation and went to say good-bye to her. "I wish you weren't doing this film," Lillian said. "Why, you surely don't think its an uncinematic subject?" Instead of replying she asked me, "Will you tell me something? How long did your work on the script take you?" "About six months." "And how long will it be before you've finished with the film? I suppose you'll see it through every stage of the cutting room?" "Of course. It should take about another six months." "A year of your life and what will you have to show at the end of it? Another *film*." "It won't be 'just another film,' Lillian!" "All I mean is," said Lillian, "that in that year you could have written two of your own plays. I won't argue with you but do try and think of that. I wish you would, you know, it's quite important for you." I said I certainly would think of it and put it out of my mind.

In the turmoil of packing, saying good-byes, seeing Mother off to relations in Canada and getting to the airport in time I didn't open my day's mail till I was settled in the plane and homeward bound for Albany, Welwyn, and the "Queen of Spades." There was a letter from Arthur. He was no longer associate producer. The explosion had clearly been a formidable one—and bomb fragments, I realized, might fall anywhere.

XVII

NOTHING BUT A PACK OF CARDS

"Over the Hill to the Law Courts..."

I started work on the "Queen of Spades" with my bright hopes slightly tarnished by an uneasy suspicion that anything might happen—and if it did, it was bound to be unpleasant. The set-up seemed calm enough on the surface and my confidence returned as we prepared to shoot the first scene. This was to be a flash-back explaining that the ancient countess, whom Edith Evans was to play, had in her youth learned a secret which she would impart to no one—the secret of how to win at cards; she had been a great beauty and had deceived her husband with a young and handsome lover.

Two of the most physically beautiful people we could think of, Pauline Tennant, Hermione Baddeley's daughter, and Yusef Ramart, Jean Kent's husband, had been chosen to appear in this scene and I was very happy about it—though Miss Kent's husband was forever disappearing from the set (he has, I believe become a farmer and was probably just not interested in pictures), and dear Otto Heller, our cameraman, was for ever wandering about asking distractedly. "*Vere* is der husband from Jean Kent?"

While I was directing an early sequence, I noticed a coolness in the management, and hourly, it seemed to me, the temperature fell.

Checking the chattering of my teeth, I continued shooting a scene in which Pauline, as the young countess, was looking out of a window while lackeys bearing candelabra entered the room behind her: only the reflection of the lights they carried were visible—I thought the effect very pleasing.

After the rushes of this scene had been shown, I was summoned by the high-ups. They had not thought it pleasing—had not understood what was supposed to be going on. I explained about the lackeys and the candelabra. "Well," I was told, "they may look

like candelabra to you but to us they simply look like car headlights."

With this barb in me, I was allowed to go on working for a few more days. The flash-backs completed, I proceeded to the first scene with Edith Evans as the old countess. She had never appeared in a film before and pretended to be nervous of the camera. "Is it looking at me?" she said in a piercing whisper as I explained her moves to her—and she kept glancing in its direction as if she suspected it of being an infernal machine, capable, at any moment, of emitting a death ray.

The aged countess, gorgeously dressed, was on her way to a ball and, as she must appear to be terribly frail, I had arranged for her to be assisted down the stairs by two maids. The maids available were a couple of capable supers; I thought they would do.

Edith began to totter down the stairs, supported on the arms of these two; suddenly she turned, came briskly up again and drawing me aside said, "Who are these people playing the maids? They're not actresses. I really don't think I can work with people who are not actresses." "No, perhaps they're not really actresses," I had to admit, "but will you do this? Just come down a few steps with them and shake them off and say, 'Go away—I can't stand you.' " This she agreed to do—and in the film she can be seen dismissing her maids with a most effectively convincing show of testiness.

The atmosphere in the studio became increasingly frigid as I went on to shoot scenes with the "juveniles"—Ronald Howard and Yvonne Mitchell. Ronnie was somewhat ill at ease (he confided to me that he had wanted to be a journalist, not an actor, and had only been talked into films by agents who saw in him a remarkable likeness, which indeed he bore, to his father, Leslie Howard)—but Yvonne took direction like an angel.

In one scene she had to burst into tears. In the theatre I had always found that young English actresses can't cry on cue; I had invariably had to show them how—and was prepared to do the same for Yvonne. This was quite unnecessary. The moment they were required, tears spurted from her eyes and she played with such intense integrity that for some minutes after we had finished shooting she was still weeping. The rushes revealed her as a fine actress with real emotion and I thought, "This scene is perfect. Even Tolly will see that. And whatever he has in mind, he *can't*

do anything after a scene like that." I'm afraid I underestimated him.

That night I received a mysterious message: I was not to go to the studios next day, as they were stopping shooting—but would I call at Mr. de Grunwald's office in the morning. I called. He told me they (his company, presumably) were not satisfied with my work and had decided they would have to get somebody else to direct the film. Finding myself incapable at the moment of saying anything but, "Oh?" I decided I had better go away and think what to do.

While I was thinking, Thorold Dickinson, an old friend of mine, telephoned me. "It's most embarrassing," he said, "but I've been asked to take over the direction of 'The Queen of Spades.' Can I come round and see you?" "Yes, do," said I. That evening, the moment he arrived he told me: "I had all the material you shot run through for me and, Rodney, do you know, it has the most extraordinary effect? It isn't like a British film at all." What, I wondered, was wrong with that? Nothing at all, in his opinion, as it transpired; he went on: Since I have been called in, how would you feel about coming back on the film as co-director with me?"

Such generous gestures are rare in the film industry. I thought it fine of Thorold to make me this offer and, as I felt as fondly about "The Queen of Spades," and as closely connected with her as the King of Spades, I was glad to accept it.

After the film had been laid off for three days, I went back to the studios with Thorold—but in the subsidiary position of co-director. Nobody, I suppose, relishes being de-moted and I, whose great ambition it had always been to direct, was inwardly feeling acutely sensitive about my reduced status. How would I now be received by the people with whom I had been working? Whatever my reception, I resolved to bear it with Buddhistic calm and resignation.

Otto Heller rushed up to me with a beaming face and a cry of, "Rodney! This is vonderful! I vas so afraid ve should not see you again on the picture." Edith Evans grasped my hand and said, "I think this is splendid of you—so *big*, so magnanimous." I was almost consoled for the fact that the device on the clapper-board which had been, "Director, Rodney Ackland" for three weeks, now read: "Directors, Thorold Dickinson, Rodney Ackland."

Inevitably, as shooting progressed, it became mainly Thorold who was directing, while I rehearsed the artists in their dialogue—so a Buddhistic resignation came in useful after all and at least enabled me to maintain my interest in the film and share in whatever fun or fury was going.

One scene in the film provided us with an unexpected laugh which did all of us good—or all of us but the unfortunate actor who was playing the countess's butler. According to plan, Anton Walbrook, as Herman, the impoverished officer, was to sneak into the countess's house to filch from her the secret of how to make a fortune at cards; the butler, hearing someone try the door, was to unleash a wolfhound and as soon as the door opened the wolfhound was to rush out into a snowstorm, and the butler was to follow.

We rehearsed the scene with a wolfhound but the animal seemed to be even more bored with filming than "the husband from Jean Kent," and was decidedly less co-operative than that other reluctant actor, Ronnie Howard. We managed to get hold of a dog of suitable size and, we were assured, great intelligence—and the make-up department (shades of sheep with wigs!) effectively disguised it as a wolfhound.

This dog was not only intelligent—it was an enthusiast. When its part was explained to it, it listened carefully, wagged its artificial tail and barked happily. We should have guessed, from the gleam in its eye, that, like many a human player, it had made up its mind to improve upon the director's instructions and "hog" the scene.

We were all set. The door rattled, the butler listened suspiciously—and then he unleashed the "wolfhound." Promptly the beast leapt at the butler who tore out off the set on the right-hand side—only to tear on again a moment later from the left, yelling blue murder and with the false wolfhound's anything but false teeth firmly embedded in his backside.

There were other less risible incidents, too, to hold one enthralled with the fantasy world of film-making. An A.C.T. ruling provided (and for all I know still does), that if a director has the cameras actually turning on a scene at 5.20 p.m., shooting can continue until 6.20 p.m., otherwise it must stop. On the day upon which we were to shoot the sequence in which the ancient countess is literally frightened to death, everything seemed to go wrong and

we were not able to start shooting until late in the afternoon.

Edith Evans, who had been standing patiently by for hours, wearing the painful rubber make-up which tortured her face into the wrinkled mask of age, and gave her a rash, was delighted when Thorold at last called for action. The time was ten minutes past five. A shop steward chose this moment to involve Thorold in an argument. Thorold was desperately anxious to get to work but nothing—except, it appeared, the clock—could stop the man's flow of talk. On the dot of twenty-one minutes past five he ceased arguing and, turning his back on the director, called to the electricians, "Pull the breakers"—indicating that shooting was terminated for the day.

As a staunch trade unionist Thorold was incensed. "If this is the way you interpret trade unionism," he told the man, "you and I and all of us will be out of work in a few years."

As we had been arbitrarily restrained from shooting the death scene that day, it had to be done the next—but poor Edith's skin had been so ruined by the rubber make-up that she could now only use ordinary greasepaint. For this reason, though in the earlier shots of the scene her face is as full of lines as a road map, in the final close-ups there is not a wrinkle to be seen.

Apart from minor disturbances, everything seemed to be working out well—until Bill Linnit, Thorold's agent, appeared one morning at the studios. After a brief conversation with him, Thorold, looking distressed, came over and told me that Linnit had been making a great fuss about having suggested I should co-direct and wanted to discuss the position with me. Thorold said he had not yet actually signed his contract on "The Queen of Spades," and Bill had now forbidden him to sign it.

With a sinking heart I let Linnit explain to me that he considered it definitely prejudicial to Thorold's future that he should figure, at this stage, as co-director on any film. Thorold was, he pointed out, an established director, with such films as "Gaslight" and "Man of Two Worlds" to his credit: it had been extremely foolish of him to suggest to me that I should work on the present picture with him and receive equal directorial credit. "I thought it had been very kind of Thorold, and said so, Linnit thought so, too, but did not want his client to kill himself through kindness: surely I could see that, if I did not wish to ruin Thorold's career, the only thing for me to do was to bow myself out of the picture and leave

him to direct it?

I had not desire to ruin Thorold's career and said that I could not possibly risk doing this by insisting on co-directing : clearly, I must withdraw. I decided Fate had here given me an imperative pointer to the way I should go : I should turn my back for good and all on the capricious celluloid mistress, give up my film-directing ambitions, take Lillian Gish's advice and concentrate on being a full-time professional playwright.

Accepting the situation, I was prepared to bid the cinema good-bye and start working seriously and solely for the theatre—but I needed some money. If I had the two thousand pounds I had been expecting from the film, I would then have the leisure in which to write a play. I issued a writ against World Screenplays, Tolly's company, for wrongful dismissal and loss of office.

No sooner had I taken this step than I received a letter from Somerset Maugham's agent in America, asking me to make a play of "Before the Party." I thought this a curious request. "Before the Party" had always seemed to me a perfectly good short story : why should anyone want to turn it into a play? Still, if a film company had asked me to write a script around the story I would have done so; I resolved to adopt the same attitude towards plays.

World Screenplays offered me five hundred pounds to settle out of court—and later increased their offer to one thousand. This I accepted and settled down to write the play. Nevertheless, I could not entirely banish "The Queen of Spades" from my mind: I telephoned Thorold and was glad to hear from him that the film was progressing satisfactorily. I still had a sneaking hope in my heart that it would be a great success.

Six months later, when I had finished "Before the Party" and "The Queen of Spades" had been completed, Thorold telephoned me : the film was to be run through at the Warner Theatre that night, at ten o'clock, and, if we liked, he would smuggle Arthur and me into a back seat. We appreciated his kindness but, as we both had dinner engagements, we were unable to accept his invitation.

We were not asked to the Press show or to the party that followed it; we were given seats for the première but, deciding that if we used them we would have to keep our comments to ourselves and might burst in the attempt, we elected to see the film the following night, when we could exercise the right of cash customers to speak

as freely as "the couple in the seats behind."

As the credit titles appeared on the screen, I exploded—but not with laughter. I was in such a rage that I had to be held down in my seat—which aroused considerable interest and amusement among the neighbouring cash customers, some of whom concluded that I was having a fit whilst others marvelled that I could be so wrought up over a film that hadn't even started. It was, of course, impossible for them to guess that what I was wrought up over was a breach of contract inherent in the credit title which announced that "The Queen of Spades" was "BY ALEXANDER PUSHKIN" and "screenplay by Rodney Ackland and Arthur Boys."

Pushkin's name, in very large letters, occupied the centre of the screen; Arthur's name and mine, in very small letters, were at the foot of the screen and, as the "credit" was only shown for some five seconds, could easily be overlooked if one had not, as we had, a particular interest in it.

The Screenwriters' Association had for years fought for proper recognition of the screenwriter's work, demanding that the writer of the screenplay should be given a separate credit entirely to himself—no other name to appear on the "card" or "frame" thrown on the screen. I had sat on a committee which, by dint of prolonged argument, had succeeded in securing a special clause to this effect in the standard contract used between writers and producers—and when I saw that this hard-won clause had been disregarded, I simply boiled with fury.

The moment the film was over I rushed to a telephone and called my solicitor at his home to say I must definitely see him first thing in the morning. Unable to sleep that night, I was waiting on his office doorstep when he arrived: I told him I wanted a writ served as soon as possible on World Screenplays Limited.

Months later, on February 21, 1950, at the Royal Courts of Justice, in the High Court of Justice King's Bench Division, the case of ACKLAND and BOYS v. WORLD SCREENPLAYS LIMITED came up before MR. JUSTICE HILBERY and a Jury.

Mr. Cyril Salmon, K.C., and Mr. Claud Duveen appeared on behalf of the Plaintiffs.

Mr. F. E. G. H. Gibbens on behalf of the Defendants.

The first witness, Mr. Thomas Ernest Bennett Clarke ("Tibbie"), was sworn, and under examination by Mr. Duveen

declared his identity and said he had been a member of the Screen-writers' Association for seven years and had been on its Executive Committee for three years. A list of the screenplays he had written was read out by Mr. Duveen—and scrupulously noted down by Mr. Justice Hilbery—after which the following dialogue ensued :

Question (Mr. Duveen). In "Passport to Pimlico" did you have the screen credit to yourself?

Answer ("Tibbie"). I did.

Q. Just explain to the Jury what that means.

A. It meant that on the card appeared the words : "Original Screenplay by T. E. B. Clarke."

Q. In your view then, is there or is there not an advantage to be gained by having the screen credit in respect of the writing of a play?

A. There is a great advantage to be gained if the film is acclaimed by the public and the critics.

Q. Will you look at this film. I believe it is called a dupe, although I am not certain what "dupe" means. (*Document handed to witness.*) Will you look at the credit on that film? It will mean unrolling it a little, I think.

A. Yes, I have found it.

Q. In your view as an experienced film writer, is that the type of credit to which Mr. Ackland and Mr. Boys were entitled as a result of the custom of the trade?

A. I should say that they were entitled to a very much better credit than that one.

Q. First of all, what is your comment about that credit? I shall want the Jury to see it in a minute.

A. Well, if I had received that credit I should be very concerned and very indignant.

Q. What would your complaint about the credit be?

A. My complaint would be that not only was it a breach of the contract between the two associations, but also that the size of type in which Pushkin's name appeared and the small type in which my name appeared would mean that my name would fail to register sufficiently with a great many critics present at the Press show for them to remember it and mention my name in their reviews.

Mr. Gibbens, cross-examining Mr. Clarke, endeavoured to

prove that very little attention was paid to screen credits and that any publicity accruing to a writer in connection with a film derived not from the screen credit given him but from the reviews.

Mr. Duveen returned to the fray to re-examine Mr. Clarke thus:

- Q. You have been asked whether the publicity value does not lie in the reviews rather than the screen credits. How do critics know, when they write their critique of a film, who has written the screenplay of a film?
- A. Because they see it on the screen.
- Q. That is the normal practice of giving information to the critics?
- A. Yes. I might add that the critics are usually given what is known as a handout, a slip of paper which is a repetition of what appears on the screen.

As the case proceeded, the "handout" was referred to, but the one said to have been used at the Press show in connection with "The Queen of Spades" was not produced by the defendants—a fact upon which Mr. Justice Hilbery pointedly commented in his summing-up, in which he pronounced "hand-out" in much the same tone as if he had been Edith Evans's Lady Bracknell pronouncing the obnoxious word "handbag" in "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Arthur Boys appeared in the stand, after Tibbie Clarke had been released, and under examination by Mr. Duveen he revealed that when the script was delivered, Mr. de Grunwald had suggested certain cuts which had necessitated "a certain amount of re-writing," willingly undertaken because "we were pleased to have a fresh mind on it as we had been working on it for months . . ."

Question (Mr. Duveen). Mr. Ackland and you did the re-writing?

A. (Mr. Boys). Yes.

Q. All Mr. de Grunwald did was to suggest where the cuts should be made?

A. Quite.

Q. On September 7th, 1947, I think either you or Mr. Ackland delivered the finally revised shooting script to Mr. de Grunwald, who accepted it?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you dine with Mr. de Grunwald shortly after that?

A. Yes.

- Q. During dinner, did he make a suggestion to you?
A. Yes. He suggested that he should have his name on the script.
Q. As what?
A. As part author of it.
Q. Was he in any sense part author?
A. Not at all.
Q. Did he also want a screen credit for the same purpose?
A. Yes, that was the idea.

After considerable argument, Arthur said, we had suggested that the matter be put before the Screenwriters' Association for arbitration—whereupon the discussion was dropped.

At a later stage in Mr. Duveen's examination of Arthur, mention was made of the prominence of screen credits given to others connected with the film in relation to that given to us.

MR. DUVEEN: May I hand in a document which is headed "Release Script" and which shows your Lordship how the credits are worked out. (*Same handed*). I see from this document that Mr. Oliver Messel, who did the settings and costumes, got a panel to himself and that the man who wrote the music got a panel to himself.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: Where is that?

MR. DUVEEN: On page two your Lordship sees, three-quarters of the way down: "Settings and costumes by Oliver Messel"; and on the next page, at the top: "Music by Georges Auric."

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: Who decides in what order the actors' names appear? I notice it says: "with Ronald Howard, Mary Jerrold, and introducing Yvonne Mitchell." Then after dissolving that out the next one goes on: "and" and then comes a list of actors and actresses. Who decides all that?

A. The producer decides all that, My Lord.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: I notice they are not put in alphabetical order. Is there supposed to be some order of their importance, like being top of the poll?

A. Yes, certainly something like that comes into it.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: It is very odd.

MR. DUVEEN: I see on the last page that the Associate Producer got a panel to himself.

A. Yes.

Q. Does the Associate Producer, in your view, play as important

a part in the making of the picture as the screenwriter?

A. No.

Q. Then Mr. de Grunwald, possibly as he was producing it, took the trouble to see that he got a panel to himself?

A. Yes.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : That is at the end ?

MR. DUVEEN : He appears twice, because in order to see that he should not be overlooked he is also at the beginning. Your Lordship sees on the first and last page : " An Anatole de Grunwald Production." That is in case anyone misses him.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : I see that everybody seems to get something in this list, the Period Adviser, Wardrobe Master and the people who provide the furs.

MR. DUVEEN : They are all there, my Lord.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : And in the language of the industry to what extent is the exhausted public at the end of the list supposed to register anything?

MR. DUVEEN : I do not know, my Lord.

In the course of cross-examining Arthur, Mr. Gibbens produced a form of handout which it was suggested, said Mr. Justice Hilbery, was used.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : It says : " Screenplay by Rodney Ackland and Arthur Boys." " Settings and costumes by Oliver Messel," in display typescript. " Produced by Anatole de Grunwald," in display typescript, and " Directed by Thorold Dickinson," in display typescript. It is all very artificial, Members of the Jury. I will hand it to you. (*Same handed*). It certainly looks as if settings and costumes, production and direction were of much more importance than what is in the script and I daresay it is true, but you will form your own views about that. You see what is displayed and what is not displayed.

Mr. Gibbens next sought to prove that, through the credit given us, Arthur and I had received gratifying publicity in the trade press. He addressed himself to Arthur.

MR. GIBBENS : On the 17th March, *The Daily Film Renter* describes the screenplay by Rodney Ackland and Arthur Boys as " Occasionally obscure but invariably dignified."

Will you have a look at that?

A. Who wrote that? Who is responsible for that? Not World Screenplays. Can you tell me who is responsible for saying this?

MR. GIBBENS : Is it there, first of all?

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : It seems to me it is the person who writes the article for this particular paper.

A. Yes. I do not see that it has anything to do with World Screenplays.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : I do not see that it has anything to do with this case.

Reverting to the question of the extent, if any, to which Mr. de Grunwald had worked on the script with us, Mr. Gibbens successfully made the point that the producer was a very well-known screenplay writer, but his efforts to prove him our collaborator brought forth a brief exchange which caused considerable laughter in court :

Q. I think you said that when you were writing the screenplay you spoke to him (Mr. de Grunwald) about it?

A. Yes.

Q. And in fact to use your own expression you were glad to see a fresh face?

A. I would not call Mr. de Grunwald's face fresh ; a fresh mind, I said.

It was soon Mr. Duveen's turn to re-examine Arthur, and he chose to bring up again the review that had appeared in *The Daily Film Renter*.

Q. I see that in the issue produced it says about "The Queen of Spades" : "An ace production which is a must for the more discerning filmgoer, though it may be a ticklish proposition for the industrials." Translated into English that is a compliment to "The Queen of Spades," is it?

A. I suppose so.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : May I see that? (*Same handed to the learned Judge*).

MR. DUVEEN : Your Lordship will see about three paragraphs down. It is a curiously phrased sentence.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : You did not translate it into English. You

said it might imply something if it was translated, but you did not translate it. What is meant by: "the industrials" there?

MR. DUVEEN: I have not the slightest idea, my Lord.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: Does this paragraph mean that it is a first-class production? They say, "An ace production"; does that mean a first-class production?

A. Yes, my Lord.

With the question of what "the industrials" could be left hanging in the air, Mr. Duveen, as Arthur withdrew, asked permission to interpose another witness before the second Plaintiff—and Mr. Leslie John Salford Arliss was called and sworn.

When Leslie had emphatically stated that screen credits are of very great importance to screenwriters, copies of the agreement between the Screenwriters' Association and the Producers' Association in relation to screen credits were produced and handed to the learned Judge and Members of the Jury; they were thus able to see for themselves that, as Leslie contended, Arthur and I had not been given the credits to which we were entitled.

Mr. Gibbens, cross-examining, suggested to Leslie that sometimes people who have had very little to do with the actual writing get credits. Leslie replied: "Well, that very rarely happens to-day. It used to happen and that is why we had this agreement." He added, later, that it was the custom of the business to follow the agreement.

At this juncture, Mr. Cyril Salmon, K.C., undertook a brief but pleasing re-examination.

Q. (Mr. Salmon). Can you tell me whether Mr. de Grunwald is a member of the association?

A. (Mr. Arliss). Yes, he has been for a long time.

Q. He is a member of the Screenwriters' Association?

A. The Screenwriters' Association, yes.

Q. They, of course, are one of the parties to the agreement: the producers are the other party.

A. The producer is the other party, yes.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: Mr. de Grunwald is not a party to this action, is he?

MR. SALMON: No, my Lord, he is a director of the defendant company. The only materiality of that is that, presumably, if in

his private capacity he knows of the agreement he may have told himself as director of the company what the agreement is.

The second Plaintiff then took the stand and, having assured Mr. Salmon that he was Rodney Ackland, admitted frankly that he was an author and screenwriter. Under pressure he confessed that he had written many screenplays, some alone and some in collaboration: "The Queen of Spades," as everybody in court must by now be aware, had, he agreed, been written with Mr. Boys.

Q. (Mr. Salmon). It is right, is it, that you were given £2,000 for your share in writing "The Queen of Spades"?

A. (Ackland). Yes.

Q. In addition to the fee that you received for writing "The Queen of Spades" with Mr. Boys, what other advantage, if any, did you hope to get from writing that screenplay?

A. Well, I hoped to be partly responsible for creating something very beautiful on the screen and rather new; to break open new horizons for the British cinema and I naturally hoped that when the film was shown I and my collaborator would get some praise and some share in the credit for having achieved this thing. Arising from that I naturally expected that I would have further opportunities of expressing ideas in the cinema which up till this moment it had been rather difficult to get by with the commercial people and thereby at the same time, of course, I hoped to make some money.

There was a stunned silence in court, and Mr. Salmon, whose excellent legal brain had instantly understood that I was capable of delivering a lecture on the Art of the Cinema at the drop of a wig, was thereafter at pains to frame his questions so that my responses could be as brief as possible; despite this, I remained voluble with vexation.

Mr. Salmon touched on Mr. de Grunwald's suggestion that he should share the screenwriting credit with Arthur and myself, and asked what I'd said to that. I declared that I was absolutely astounded by the idea as I had never heard of such a thing before.

When Mr. Salmon enquired what my reactions had been on seeing the offending credit titles on the screen, I burst out: "Well, I can only say that when I saw them Mr. Boys had to hold me down in my seat. I was overcome. It was the sort of thing I had not had for fifteen years or more in the cinema and the sort of

thing we had all been fighting against. I was absolutely dumb-founded when I saw this thing come on the front of the screen to represent our weeks and months of creative effort."

"Do you think your name represented in that way enhanced your reputation at all?" asked Mr. Salmon. "It was absolutely shaming for me," said I (with a film director's vision in my mind's eye of an actor hiding his face in his hands on speaking the line).

Mr. Gibbens, cross-examining, seemed eager to persuade me that Arthur and I had been given adequate publicity in the reviews of "The Queen of Spades," as our names had been mentioned in *The Daily Film Renter*. I could not be persuaded. Mr. Salmon, re-examining, drew from me a statement that not one of the seven or eight other trade papers had mentioned our names and that, of the ordinary newspapers, only the *Sunday Times* had done so—and that, as I sat on two committees with this paper's critic, I imagined she must have included our names in her review as a result of my having discussed Pushkin with her and referred to the film on which Arthur and I were working.

I was permitted to withdraw.

Frank Launder was the next witness called—and he was followed by Roger McDougall and Roger Burford. Since proceedings of this nature are invariably repetitious, I feel I may be excused from giving the testimony of these well-known and reputable film people in detail. I think it is sufficient if I assure the reader that their testimony corroborated and upheld the statements of their equally well-known and reputable colleagues, "Tibbie" Clarke and Leslie Arliss.

After Mr. Burford had withdrawn, the court adjourned until 10.30 the following morning.

Mr. Gibbens opened the case on behalf of the Defendants and proceeded to examine Mr. Robert Clark, whose replies were, at the outset, admirably brief.

Q. (Mr. Gibbens). Are you the executive in charge of the production for Associated British Picture Corporation Limited?

A. (Mr. Clark). I am.

Q. Have you a wide experience in the film industry on the production side?

A. For the last twenty-five years.

Q. And in particular has your work been with regard to writers?

A. Yes.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : You say that your experience has been on the production side ?

A. On all sides, but mainly on production.

MR GIBBENS : Is the custom in the film industry as regards credits that writers should receive laid down in an agreement between the British Film Producers' Association and the Screenwriters' Association.

A. Yes.

Q. In this case, where two screenplay writers write a screenplay, should they have had one panel to themselves on the film ?

A. Yes.

Q. Under that agreement ?

A. Under that agreement, yes.

" Well," I thought, " that's fine. Nothing could be clearer. I wonder if he's really on *our* side ? " But, alas, having agreed that Arthur and I had not been given proper credit, Mr. Clark went on to contend that, as far as he was concerned, the fact that a writer had been given a screen credit was of little account : a producer embarking on a film would select the names of possible writers from either his own list or one furnished by the Screenwriters' Association and, having done so, would look back on their previous record and then make his choice.

Q. So the previous record weighs with you ?

A. Very much so.

Q. Do you take much notice of the screen credit itself ?

A. No, not at all.

When asked if he would say the credit given in the instance under discussion detracted from the screenplay writers, Mr. Clark replied, " No. Mr. Ackland's reputation is too well established for that notice to have affected it in any way."

Cross-examining Mr. Clark, Mr. Cyril Salmon asked :

Q. Do you agree that if it had not been so well established it might have had a bad effect ?

A. No.

Q. Of course, Mr. Boys' reputation was not established at all ?

A. I had not known Mr. Boys as a scenario writer at all.

As the cross-examination proceeded, the matter of the sum paid for the script was raised.

Q. (Mr. Salmon). Associated British Picture Corporation financed the defendants' production of this picture?

A. (Mr. Clark). Yes.

Q. Did the defendants submit to your company in their budget for this film the cost of the script as being £5,000?

A. I do not know myself.

Q. Look at the budget. (*Document handed to the witness.*) Your company was subpoenaed to produce a budget and it is produced by your company, so perhaps you can tell me if it is right.

A. If that was approved by us, then it would be right.

Q. Look at it.

A. £5,000 for story rights. Story rights are distinct from scenario rights. In the first place, a film company buys the film rights in a novel and then they engage scenario writers to write the scenario. These are distinct items.

Q. What are distinct items?

A. The cost of the story and the cost of the scenario.

MR. JUSTICE HILBERY: Buying the rights in the story from the holder of the copyright of the story.

MR. CYRIL SALMON: There is nothing else included in that, is there?

A. According to this budget, it says, "Story rights, £5,000."

Q. . . . The defendant company is there charging Associated British Pictures £5,000 for the story rights?

A. For the story rights.

Q. For the script?

A. As there is nothing in this budget here for the cost of the scenario, I can only assume that £5,000 includes the cost of the rights in the story and in the scenario.

Q. Your company paid £5,000 to the defendants?

A. Yes.

Q. No one paid the executive of Mr. Pushkin anything, so far as you know, did they?

A. Not to my knowledge. To my knowledge they did not.

Q. Your company is the company that paid. As far as you know did anyone have any interest in these story rights other than



THE PARTY SPIRIT SURVIVES THE DUBLIN NOTICES
Burgess Meredith, with the Duke of Leeds, singing at his party



"PHYSICALLY BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE"

The daughter of Hernione Baddeley and the husband of Jean Kent



THE DAME IN THE RUBBER MASK

Edith Evans and Anton Walbrook in "The Queen of Spades"

Mr. Ackland and Mr. Boys?

A. I do not know.

Mr. Clark, it transpired, had not dealt with this particular film; it was dealt with by the managing director of the company, who had since died. A little later in the cross-examination, the weekly costs of production sheets (produced on subpoena by A.B.P.S.) were scrutinized—and the upshot of the long involved discussion which ensued was the following (in which reference is made to specific cost of production sheets):

Q. (Mr. Salmon) . . . Will you please assume that the only persons who had any rights in the story or script were Ackland and Boys: will you assume that for a moment?

A. (Mr. Clark). Yes.

Q. On that assumption, does that column purport to show that £3,700 by the 21st of February had been paid out to those two gentlemen, or that a debt to that amount had been incurred to those two gentlemen?

A. Yes.

Q. Would you turn on to the other sheet that is turned down for March. On the assumption that I asked you to make just now, do you agree that the sheet for the 6th March shows that the figure of £5,000 had been paid to these two gentlemen or else a debt to that amount had been incurred to them?

A. On your assumption, yes.

Mr. Salmon's assumption was clearly not, I observed to myself with regret, the one upon which World Screenplays had acted—for Arthur had received £1,000 and I £2,000 for the script. The argument between cross-examiner and witness reverted to the value of credits to writers, but I found myself speculating—idly, of course, since film finance is one of the major mysteries of the modern world—as to where that extra two thousand had got to.

The next, and last, witness to be called was Sir Alexander Korda, whom Mr. Gibbens proceeded to examine:

Q. You are a film producer?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you had a wide experience in the film industry?

A. I have.

- Q. Have you had experience on the production side?
- A. Yes.
- Q. And experience of dealing with writers?
- A. Yes.
- Q. What do you say about the credits which are given to screen-play writers, as to their importance?
- A. To whom?
- Q. To the producer. Would you take notice of it as a producer?
- MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : Did you say, of what importance to the producer?
- MR. GIBBENS : Yes, my Lord.
- MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : Do you mean that, or to the writer?
- MR. GIBBENS : What notice would you as a producer take of a screen credit given for a writer?
- A. The size or the shape of the screen credit?
- Q. Yes.
- A. I do not think I would attach very much importance to that; I would judge rather on the quality of the work.
- Q. Look at this screen credit. (*Same handed to the witness*). If, under the custom in the industry, the writers there were entitled to a panel to themselves, would you say that was detrimental to the writers?
- A. I should not think so, as it could not be a detriment to them if it was Shakespeare on the same panel. It would not be detrimental if their name would be printed with Shakespeare's, or some of the other great writers.
- MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : I do not think it is suggested that it is detrimental because of the association with any particular name.
- A. The size? I do not think it would matter a very great deal.
- MR. GIBBENS : It would not affect your judgment on the matter?
- A. I would not judge anybody on the size of the screen credit.
- MR. JUSTICE HILBERY : It is not the size?
- A. The form?
- Q. No. It is more especially not having given the panel in the regular way to the screenwriters themselves alone, but having it split up between them and the source of the story.
- A. I see. Well, I would not think I should judge anybody, if I would think of giving them an engagement, on the shape

or form of the credit they have on anything.

Mr. Cyril Salmon began his cross-examination of Sir Alex. :

Q. You are a producer?

A. Yes.

Q. Would you agree that one of the things upon which you judge a producer is by the quality of his work?

A. That is the only thing I should say I would judge a producer by.

Q. You would agree, would you not, nevertheless, that so far as a producer is concerned, good publicity is of great value to him?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you ever had the sort of publicity that was given to Mr. Rodney Ackland and Mr. Boys in this case?

A. In very many cases my name is not at all on the film. I have my name on the film in the last four years only once.

Q. But your producers have their names—the people you employ to produce have their names?

A. I am speaking of the pictures I have produced : my name is not on.

Q. Which picture are you talking of now?

A. About three years ago I just stopped putting my name on pictures.

Q. I do not know whether my memory or my eyes have played me false, but before then in some of your very famous pictures the public would not have had any difficulty in seeing who the name of the producer was, would they?

A. I took very great care over that!

In view of his earlier contention that credits did not matter a great deal, I wondered why he had taken "very great care." It was rather baffling; I was still puzzling it out when Mr. Justice Hilbery began to address the Jury. His summing-up—which was long but lucid—concluded :

"You know perfectly well the breach of contract which is alleged and admitted—failure to give the screen credit to these two writers which the defendants contracted to give in similar terms to that contract between the British Film Producers' Association and the Screenwriters' Association with regard to the display and the names being alone on the credit. You

know all that; and you will come back and tell me what sum you award to each of the plaintiffs."

The jury retired at 1 p.m.—and naturally Arthur and I were in a state of suspense during their absence. They returned into court at 1.35 p.m.

THE ASSOCIATE : Members of the Jury, have you all agreed upon your verdict?

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY : We have.

THE ASSOCIATE : Do you find for the plaintiff Rodney Ackland?

THE FOREMAN : We do.

THE ASSOCIATE : In what amount?

THE FOREMAN : The sum of £1,000.

THE ASSOCIATE : Do you find for the plaintiff Arthur Boys?

THE FOREMAN : We do.

THE ASSOCIATE : In what amount?

THE FOREMAN : In the amount of £2,000.

THE ASSOCIATE : And that is the verdict of you all?

THE FOREMAN : That is the verdict of us all.

It was over—and we had won! Our screenwriting colleagues were almost as elated as we were and showered us with congratulations on our victory. I was conscious and ashamed of the smug expression my face was wearing : I needn't have worried—Fate was standing by to wipe it off.

With dismaying alacrity, World Screenplays Limited went bankrupt. Instead of getting our damages, Arthur and I found ourselves stuck with our costs—£500.

So if any little Peterkin wants to know : "What good came of it at last?" our reply is the same as Old Kaspar's—" 'Why that I cannot tell' said he, 'But 'twas a famous victory.' "

XVIII

NO PAX FOR THE DISTRIBUTORS

"A Fragrant Tale"

To say that after bringing and winning a lawsuit against a film company, the doors of British studios closed in my face with an angry, and this time an irrevocable bang! would, though dramatically effective, be to use a small degree of dramatic licence.

The truth is that after a long interval they were opened again just wide enough for me to hear a sound of hollow laughter from within, then, the mistake realized, slam they went again and the key was turned and the bolts shot.

About eighteen months after Arthur and I left the High Courts of Justice planning what we were going to do with our "three thousand pounds damages," Marcel Helman telephoned and asked me to write a screenplay based on Angela du Maurier's novel "Treveryan." The price he offered was a quarter of what I used to get but after hume-ing and hawing in an unsuccessful effort to raise it I gave in and agreed.

By this time I was married, a play of mine had just folded in the provinces and my wife had recently been sacked from her job with London Films in one of those wholesale sackings they seem to go in for following the periodic revelations of how many million pounds have been lost on their films. So the "Treveryan" offer came as an unexpected windfall.

Miss du Maurier I noticed had forewarned intending readers of her novel by a Shakespearean quotation on the title page: "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul . . ." I couldn't help thinking that, if this was anything to go by, the book was certainly an odd choice of subject for a British film company.

I thought it odder still when I'd finished reading "Treveryan" which is about hereditary insanity and incestuous love. The mystery was explained later when I discovered that somebody

had somehow managed to persuade Wardour Street that as Angela du Maurier bears the same celebrated surname as Daphne, and that as her harrowing tale is set, like her sister's most famous best-seller, in Cornwall, the picture would almost certainly turn out to be another "Rebecca."

But film distributors and executives have a sense of values peculiar to themselves and the unfolding of a tale to harrow up their souls (with any success) and to cause each particular hair of their knotted and combined locks to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpentine would call for a hero who quoted poetry,* and a heroine with a flat chest, rather than the engulfing shadows of the mad-house as described by Miss du Maurier. An extravagant conclusion to reach about this strange breed the reader may think, but it is based on first-hand evidence.

In the offices of the company concerned, in Golden Square one ungolden afternoon, I saw an inter-office memo from a very, very exalted executive to another executive only a golden rung or two below him: it was a report on "Treveryan."

This novel I might say, begins with a devoted husband going stark mad and cutting his wife's throat during a ball and ends with a semi-demented spinster shooting in cold blood the half-brother for whom she has an incestuous passion, and being sent to Broadmoor. In between these two lurid episodes in high-life, Miss du Maurier describes deaths from cancer, Lady Chatterley-like couplings in barns, miscarriages, illegitimate children palmed off on unsuspecting husbands and the shadows of incipient homicidal-mania brooding over all. The report said: "A fragrant little tale but rather thin."

Thin or thick "Treveryan" provided a superabundance of "strong" scenes in which the heroine received knock-out blows from Fate and everybody seemed to be delighted with the way I rose to the various tear-jerking occasions.

Every time the wretched heroine made an entrance with even the wannest of smiles, she was always "little dreaming," and within a couple of pages I'd find myself having to write again: "Camera tracks into Big Close-up of Bethel (for such was the heroine's name). She stands as though stunned. Fade-out." If not standing as though stunned, she was sitting as though frozen,

* "Poof's talk." See "An Englishman's Home," page 123.

lying as though pole-axed or falling in a dead faint.

In spite of a certain feeling of monotony, all this was enjoyable enough in the writing, and lunacy and incestuous love made a pleasant change from blindness as screenplay afflictions. But I had to keep *not* reminding myself that for the role of this delicately nurtured Victorian lady from one of the oldest—though undoubtedly the barmiest—families in Cornwall, the company was determined to cast Lana Turner.

As well as the major problem of how to present madness and incest in a manner acceptable to the Hay's Office, I was faced at the outset with an unexpected poscr. "Treveryan" is not only the name of the dotty family whose tendency to homicidal mania breaks out every generation or two but is also the name of their ancestral home; the word therefore plays a very large part in the story in addition to furnishing the title, and the producers were afraid that audiences would find difficulty in pronouncing it.

Even if they could, I was told, there was certain to be some confusion with the word "Trevelyan." Another family name must be found.

I suggested that the simplest thing would be to anticipate audience reactions and use "Trevelyan" anyway.

But in that case, it was objected, audiences would confuse "Trevelyan" with "Treveryan." So we were back where we started.

At various stages of the script we had "Veryan," "Trevenna," "Treggenion," "Treggunian" and almost every Cornish place-name except Mousehole. We finally finished up with "St. Hilary."

Marcel still had his eye on the American market and as in the days of "Wanted for Murder," everything from a change of name to a whole chunk of script was submitted for vetting to an American film executive in the distribution line.

The comments of this arbiter were passed on to me verbatim in letters from my employers. They were more or less according to form except one that was so much so as to be in the real "Englishman's Home," or pre-war *Punch* tradition. A rather angry half-page was given up to asking what I thought I was doing putting into characters' mouths words in Latin which would be Greek to the average American, and saying that if I continued wasting everybody's time in this stupid way I'd better

smarten up my ideas.

I was given the impression that if the company allowed this sort of stuff to go into the picture, any hopes they might cherish of an American distribution might just as well be given up.

Audiences from the States, once gathered, would storm the box offices demanding their money back if this particular line were permitted to offend their ears.

I couldn't help feeling this oracle was making a lot of fuss about very little. The line wasn't even a line except in the actor's sense of "lines" to be learned: it was one word.

I had made a small boy call temporary halt to a game by holding up crossed fingers and saying, "Pax!" I pointed out that it wasn't even correct to say the word wouldn't be understood by American audiences.

"What about the millions of Roman Catholics?" I asked. "They, at least, would be familiar with the phrase 'Pax Vobiscum'—and, come to that what about 'Quo Vadis'?" Audiences may well have taken this to be, like "Ben Hur," the name of the hero: "Quo Vadis, the son of Ben Vadis," but in any case it didn't seem to have made any difference to the receipts.

I might as well have saved my breath. The use of the word "Pax" had started a sort of panic in the executive offices and out it had to come.

This was the only real brush I had with them until we got on to the last third of the picture. Lulled into a sense of security I delivered with pride my scenes leading up to the climax.

After an ominous silence of some days, came a registered letter demanding what was this nonsense, this rubbish I had dared to serve up as sequences for a screenplay.

The nonsense and rubbish which I'd sat up writing all night for several nights in a frenzy of mistaken inspiration, was based on what seemed to me the undeniably true psychology of Miss du Maurier's heroine.

Eleanor Veryan (she didn't last long as Bethel Treveryan), had renounced marriage because of the taint of homicidal-mania in her blood, and when her half-brother, who knew just as much about the family skeleton as she did, married a horrid nurse who wasn't even a lady, and got her with (potentially homicidal) child, Eleanor became very sour indeed. In fact she developed into quite a bitch and finished up by taking a gun in a thunder-

storm and shooting the brother dead.

After an exchange of letters as angrily bitter as anything thought up by Miss du Maurier for the book, I calmed down enough to be able to breathe the air of a script conference.

I learned that if I thought I could show a British film heroine becoming soured and bitchy and shooting her brother in cold blood, I didn't know my job. "What else would she become or do in the circumstances?" I asked the assembled conference. And anyway, I added, that is what Angela du Maurier had written in "Treveryan," and I thought we were supposed to be making a screen version of what she had written.

They retorted that such behaviour in a heroine was all very well within the covers of a book, but wasn't good enough for the screen. It would be *unsympathetic*. The effect of her tribulations and renunciations on a *screen* heroine would be to make her sweeter and sweeter, and instead of wanting to shoot her brother she would want to Save Him From Himself and *he* would start trying to shoot *her*. In *The Struggle*, the gun would go off and (arriving neatly at the original situation by a different route) she'd be accused of murder, and the scene would then be set for a quick acquittal and final fade-out in the arms of the faithful-dobbin hero.

I said I couldn't write it.

Very well, I was told, the company had plenty of contract-writers who would be only too pleased to.

The job was assigned to Phil Parks. I was asked to meet him, consented under protest and found someone intensely sympathetic and talented who, as a contract-writer, had to write what he was told. Together we cooked up the nonsense as desired.

There had been a lot of controversy as to what Angela du Maurier's grim fantasia on the theme of inbred lunacy should be called on the screen. "Treveryan" was *out*, of course, and "St. Hilary" didn't seem a very good title; the new name of the heroine, "Eleanor Veryan," was not only euphonious but easy to pronounce, and I thought that the executives would settle for that. Not at all.

A week or two after finishing work with Phil, I received a roneoed screenplay, "By Rodney Ackland and Phil Parks." It was called "Yours For Ever."

I waited with a certain amount of interest for announcements

in the gossip columns that Lana Turner had been cast in a new Angela du Maurier film. No such announcement appeared. Sometime later I ran into Phil Parks. "What's happened about 'Treveryan'?" I asked him. "Treveryan?" said Phil. "Oh, they put it on the shelf." "On the shelf?" I repeated. "After all that fuss and bother about getting the script *right*, let alone what they must have paid for the rights of the novel? Did they give any reason for shelving it?"

"Oh, yes," said Phil. "They had their reasons. They decided that hereditary lunacy was not a suitable subject for the screen."

At this period of cinema history the "Cinderella of the Arts," as it was sometimes called in the days of my enamoured youth, had been married for nigh on fifty years to her Prince Big Business, and was now become no Old Dutch of the Arts, but an unattractive Circe. Under her spell (so it seemed to me), screenwriters and directors alike, in their efforts to attain producerhood were liable to become transformed into various types of swine and as it was plain enough by now that she considered *me* an "unsuitable subject" at her court, I'd decided long before "Treveryan" to snap out of the spell before my swine-like propensities got too firm a hold.

In the period between the production of "Before the Party" and the hearing of *R. Ackland and A. Boys v. World Screenplays Ltd.*, I had made one final effort to achieve something on the lines of what I was later to express in my "heat-generating" (to quote Mr. Justice Hilbery) speech from the witness box: "... I hoped to be partly responsible for creating something very beautiful on the screen and rather new; to break open new horizons for the British cinema..."

In the autumn of 1949, Brian Hurst and John Sutro approached me to collaborate with Dmitri Kirsanoff—who was to direct the film—on the screenplay of a modern version of "Crime and Punishment," set against a background of post-war Paris.

Brian was an old colleague whom I always enjoyed working with, Sutro, a man of wit and culture, was as unlike a typical film executive as Essence from Ape, and Kirsanoff was the creator of two silent-film poems, "Brumes d'Automne" and "Menilmontant," which were amongst the dozen or so treasures preserved in my private dream vault; films like "Jeanne Ney," "Caligari," Dreyer's "Vampyr," "Sous Les Toits," and the

Griffith films, which I'd seen so many times that, whenever I felt like it, I could run them through on the screen of my mind's eye, shot for shot, from opening fade-in to final fade-out.

In spite of my earlier decision to follow Lillian's advice at last and devote myself entirely to playwriting, the set-up and the subject were too tempting to resist and I signed the contract.

When making Dostoevsky's novel into a play I had omitted altogether the character of Svidrigailoff—or perhaps I should say finked it.

This tremendous and terrifying figure who embodies the ideas of Raskolnikoff carried to their monstrous conclusion is so much stronger than that of the vacillating student that I felt it impossible to include them both in the framework of a single play.

In writing the screenplay I accepted the challenge and, aided by Dmitri and by the knowledge of Dostoevsky acquired in my previous work, I managed to achieve—or so I flatter myself—a dramatic balance between the two early exponents of existentialism.

We were all pleased with the result and I thought my dialogue the best I'd ever written. James Donald was to play the modern Raskolnikoff; Peter Lorre, the examining magistrate; Lillian was to interpret Katerina again, and it was hoped that George Sanders would be signed for the Svidrigailoff part. Off we all went to Paris to start shooting. Sutro remained behind to fix distribution for the film.

But he couldn't fix it. Nothing would persuade Wardour Street to distribute such a subject. Even if he had offered them an atheletic-type guy like Cornel Wilde for Raskolnikoff, it seemed that they wouldn't have considered it. Even with Jane Russell as Sonia...

So back from Paris we all came and on to the shelf or into the waste paper basket went the screenplay of "'Crime and Punishment' in modern dress." With it went the last vestige of my hopes of achieving something "important" on the screen.

By this time the reader may be wondering why, after all these "lessons," I hadn't long ago given up my screen ambitions as a bad job. The answer is that I *had*.

But I'd soon learnt another kind of lesson. It was all very well to follow Lillian's advice I found; but the three or four thousand a year I'd become used to earning as a screenwriter had enabled

me to be independent of the success or failure of my plays. When my latest theatrical effort didn't transfer from the Lyric, Hammersmith to the West End, it became increasingly clear that, without aid from the Circe of the Arts, my life would have to be reorganized on a definitely B. picture budget and after my abortive attempt during "Treveryan" to fall in with Wardour Street ideas by making "a fragrant little tale (but rather thin)" even fragranter and thinner I went through a fragrant little time—away from the polluted air of film studios—which was thinner than any time I'd been through since 1929.

Three years after "Treveryan" the studio doors opened to me once again. They were not those of British studios however: to use the language of ancient sub-titles, "they were in a fabled city in a far off land," a sea port which was, I believe, the actual, original inspiration of that most famous sub-title of all: "Where Sin Rears Its Ugly Head."

XIX

"PLUS ÇA CHANGE..."

"The Shadow of Egypt...28 Years Later"

The film industry and I had not been on speaking terms for what seemed a long, long time—and, feeling that communication between us might very well never be resumed, I had turned again to playwriting.

"The Pink Room" was presented, "The Old Ladies" was revived—and still I hankered after the cinema, that Messalina who had tantalized me all my life. My wife sympathized with me—but she had a hankering of her own; ever since our marriage we had, like so many others, mostly lived in rooms or hotels, and Mabbie longed for a flat large enough to allow two writers to work undisturbed by the maddening clatter of another busy typewriter in the same room. Out of nowhere, such a flat suddenly materialized.

Came the glorious Monday morning when we could move in. I was humping the last trunk down the stairs of our "residential hotel," assisted by a heavily-breathing porter, when the telephone rang and the cry went up, "Mr. Ackland, it's for you." "Oh, damn," I said. "Tell them to hold on until we get down." There is nothing I find more wearing than moving, so I probably sounded somewhat grumpy when I took up the telephone and said, "Yes, what is it?"

It was George Routledge, the agent (husband of that lovely actress, Megs Jenkins), ringing to ask if I would be free to go—at Gregory Ratoff's request—to Cairo on Friday to work on the script of a film to be made in Egypt, with the co-operation of the Egyptian government—a film about the downfall of a king, who was to be called Abdullah.

I couldn't believe my ears. "Is this a joke?" I asked. George assured me that it was not: it was perfectly serious and, what was more, urgent. "I'll be round to see you in an hour," I said. I

bundled the trunk into a taxi and sped round to the new flat to break the news to Mabbie, who had gone on ahead with our other belongings. In the midst of the chaos moving-in entails, Mabbie sat down on a packing case and said, "We'll simply have to leave the unpacking until we get back!" I tore off to see George.

The film, it appeared, was to be directed by Gregory Ratoff, who was also to play the leading role of Abdullah: it crossed my mind that to direct *and* star might prove somewhat tricky, even for such a dynamo as Gregory—but in any case, to work with him could not fail to be interesting.

The backer of the project was (I was given to understand) a millionaire who lived in Italy and had offices in Paris: I gathered he had no desire to visit Egypt at the moment but, having money in the country which he could not bring out, thought it would be a good idea to make a film there as a sort of investment—I suppose under some arrangement whereby part of the profits made on the international distribution of the film would accrue to him.

The Egyptian authorities were apparently very happy at the thought of having a film which would show the world that revolution could be justified; they did not seem to mind that it would be financed by a non-resident backer, scripted by various non-Egyptian writers, including British and American, and would be directed by and star a Russian—but they did reserve the right to veto and advise on the story. A preliminary script existed: the backer had it in Paris. Another scriptwriter, George St. George—a Russian-American who had written for Mae West during her film career, and who was the author of the play, 'Caviare to the General,' in which Gregory's first wife, Eugenie Leontovich, had starred in London—was already in Egypt, working on the story with Mr. Ratoff.

It all sounded slightly fantastic—but the prospect of spending six winter weeks in Egypt and such luxury as a millionaire could afford was irresistible. The only snag, I said, was that I did not want to leave Mabbie in London. George was quite certain there would be no difficulty about arranging for Mabbie to go to Egypt with me, as the backer was an understanding person and the production one on which no expense would be spared. Meantime, he said, I must fly to Paris on Wednesday, just for the day, to meet this backer.

I flew to Paris. The backer was a dark, good-looking man of about forty, extremely elegant and with charming manners. I told him I should be very happy to work on the script if my wife might accompany me. But, *of course*, Madame must not be parted from her husband—that would be barbarous, he said. I asked him if he was deeply interested in the cinema, as I was. He replied, almost apologetically, that really he was not: he had only seen two films in all his life—"Scarface" and "The Merry Widow."

Seated on either side of his magnificent desk, we went through the existing script, of which each of us had a copy. Did I not agree, he asked, that there should be certain modifications?

I did: it seemed to me that, no doubt from a desire to please the Egyptian government, the scriptwriter had rather overdone the anti-Abdullah propaganda. He had also, I imagine for a lark, thrown in a scene in which a seductive young person cunningly delayed the lecherous Abdullah's flight from the capital by regaling him with a Dance of the Seven Veils: the story ended with Abdullah, dispossessed, miserably peddling oriental rugs round the cafés of Paris. The backer was a little dubious about these scenes.

We went through the script again, noting down suggested amendments. It transpired that, though the subject was to be handled seriously, the backer had no objection to a little light relief, in what he considered the right place. The most endearing of his notes—which he made on separate sheets of paper and handed to me—read, "In this scene comes jokes and laughs." It was altogether a delightful interview.

When he was sure I fully understood his conception of the story for the film he told me that I would, of course, have to discuss it further with Mr. Ratoff and the other scriptwriters in Egypt. I could hardly wait!

As we parted he remarked benevolently that he was thinking of making another film on which he would need at least five scriptwriters, and he hoped I would be one of them. I asked what the film was to be. "The Life of Stalin," he said.

It suddenly occurred to me to ask if the Egyptian film had been given a title. "At first it was to be called 'His Kingdom for a Woman,'" he said, "but now we are calling it 'Abdullah the Great,' though this may be changed, too."

That had a familiar ring, somehow. On the way back to the airport I recalled that Jannings had made a film for UFA originally entitled "Danton," then "Loves of the Great," and finally, "All for a Woman." Plus ça change . . .

The following day and night there was so much to do, neither Mabbie nor I had time to sleep. On Friday, Cairo bound, we boarded the plane in a daze and fell into a coma : we arrived in Cairo as in a dream.

Reservations had been made for us at the Semiramis Hotel : it was obviously true that no expense was to be spared. Mr. Gregory Ratoff, we were told, had a suite in the same hotel. I felt we should call on him as soon as possible.

While we were tidying ourselves after our journey, I wondered whether Milo Sabo, Mr. Ratoff's loyal henchman—a character with an angelic disposition and misleadingly tough exterior—was still with him. I wondered if Gregory Ratoff had changed since I last saw him.

I remembered him as a powerful personality of extraordinary vitality, a man whose eccentricities all who knew him and recognized his genius readily forgave. In any situation in private life, he loved to give a wonderfully exaggerated performance of himself reacting to that situation : his despair was never less than abysmal, his rages nothing short of towering, and his pleasure was as ecstatic as his displeasure was thunderous. He was exciting, if exhausting, company.

The door of Mr. Ratoff's suite was opened to us by Milo : I was delighted to find he was still around. From the drawing-room came great cries of rage : Mr. Ratoff was clearly playing a scene of god-like anger—and had not changed a bit. We heard him shout : "This man is the most horrible human being who ever walked on the earth ! " I looked inquiringly at Milo, who shrugged and said, "It is some big shot connected with the picture he is mad at."

We peeped in at the drawing-room door. Mr. Ratoff was striding back and forth in what appeared to be a passion, gesticulating furiously and uttering splendid noises. On his head he wore a tarboosh very fetchingly—and behind him, and sometimes beside him, dodging Mr. Ratoff's wildly waving arms, fluttered a wretched little man, obviously a tailor's assistant, trying vainly to adjust the fit of Mr. Ratoff's suit. Two men, seated on opposite sides of the room, were watching Mr. Ratoff's performance. One

was dark-eyed and anxious-looking : " He's this big-shot's lawyer, —Italian, doesn't speak English," said Milo. The other was a short, stocky man with a pale, sad comedian's face : he turned out to be the scriptwriter, George St. George.

We went into the drawing-room. Gregory waved to us and, stimulated by this addition to his audience, began to improve upon his performance—hurling himself about the room and roaring vituperation in French, Italian, Russian and English. Every now and then the tarboosh fell off, was trampled on, snatched up and jammed back on his head. Suddenly he pounced upon a letter lying on a table, picked it up, whirled round, shook it at us and screamed, " Now! Hear how I have written to this horrible man! " He proceeded to read, at the top of his voice, a letter that deserved to be included in some anthology of invective : it ended, " You are not only a crook but a laughing-stock." Mr. Ratoff read this line twice, with immense feeling and satisfaction. Then he threw down the letter and roared with laughter : wiping the sweat from his face and beaming, he said in a normal voice : " Compared with a letter I once wrote to (he named a famous film figure) this is a Christmas card."

The performance over, he came to me with outstretched arms, saying, " My friend, you are here! And this is your wife? My dear, I am so happy you could come with Rodney. You will excuse me a moment while I finish trying on these detestable clothes? Yes—only a moment? Milo, look after them—introduce them . . . " He plunged into his bedroom, followed by the tailor's assistant who looked rather relieved at the prospect of getting on with his job, but left the bedroom door open—possibly not relishing the idea of being closeted alone with a temperamental client. For the next twenty minutes or so we chatted to Milo and George St. George—our conversation punctuated with such hideous yelps of anger from the bedroom that Mabbie was convinced the tailor's man must be sticking pins into Mr. Ratoff. Eventually the harassed little man emerged with several suits over his arm, bowed hurriedly to us and fled from the suite as if the devil were after him. Out of the bedroom bounded Mr. Ratoff, his fat, white, bare legs twinkling under a short dressing-gown and a new tarboosh on his head. (He evidently considered this head-gear vastly becoming for he wore it all the time, even in the street—and, we suspected, in bed.)

Any simple question that Mr. Ratoff puts to one is usually prefaced by a long, portentous speech so that one wonders what on earth he is leading up to and feels it must be something equivalent at the very least to the launching of a battleship. I knew this, but Mabbie did not, so when Gregory approached us, took our hands, looked from one to the other and began a disconcerting preamble—"What I now have in mind for you, perhaps, may not seem important, but me, I see it as of a great significance . . . it concerns your wife . . ."—I saw an expression of acute anxiety creep over Mabbie's face. The point Mr. Ratoff eventually raised with me was this, "Would your wife consent to appear as one of the women in the costume ball sequence?" "Of course she would—wouldn't you, Mabbie?" I said. "Yes, of course . . . delighted . . ." said Mabbie faintly, reaching for a cigarette to steady her nerves while Mr. Ratoff shouted, "This is splendid! Magnificent!" He couldn't have been more pleased: we had apparently made his day.

(Mabbie, I may say, didn't appear at the costume ball: at the time we left Egypt, Mr. Ratoff had not yet reached that sequence.)

In excellent spirits, Mr. Ratoff embarked upon another long speech, praising my "genius" and referring to me as "the maître"—and ending, "My friends, relax yourselves. Do not think of work, do not worry about bills—have anything you want. Enjoy yourselves—that is what I want, that you enjoy yourselves. That is why you are here."

The interview was over. Mabbie and I, utterly exhausted, returned to our rooms to relax ourselves: it was wonderful to think I did not have to start work immediately. Perhaps we could have a day or two in which to look around Cairo.

Early the following morning the telephone rang: I answered it sleepily. A courteous voice said, "Good morning, Mr. Ackland—welcome to Egypt. And how is Madame?" Madame, I said was well—and who was speaking? "This is Mr. El Guindi, the Egyptian producer of the film. When would it be convenient for us to meet?" I knew nothing of an Egyptian producer so I explained that Mabbie and I had been terribly tired after our journey and were not yet up: could I telephone him later in the day? Mr. El Guindi apologized for having been so inconsiderate as to call so early and gave me his telephone number.

After breakfast I telephoned Gregory Ratoff to ask him about Mr. El Guindi. There was an explosion at the other end of the

line and, in a voice that could have been heard all over Cairo, Mr. Ratoff roared, "He is NOT the Egyptian producer of this film! There is no Egyptian producer of this film! You are not to see or speak to this man!" "Very well," I said, meekly. Slightly calmed, Mr. Ratoff said, "You will come and see me. We must waste no time. You come in an hour." "Yes," I said—dismissing my dream of peacefully exploring Cairo with Mabbie.

When I presented myself at his suite, Gregory greeted me with, "Ah, my friend! We do not need to hold conference this morning: we shall meet this afternoon, everybody will meet. Mr. and Mrs. El Guindi are giving a reception to celebrate the commencement of the film." "El Guindi?" I asked, doubting that I had heard him aright. "Yes, yes—El Guindi. He is the Egyptian producer of the film," said Mr. Ratoff. I must have looked a little puzzled: Mr. Ratoff went on, "Yes, I know I said he was not. We had had a disagreement—but now everything is good again and he is."

The reception was held at our hotel: as Mr. and Mrs. El Guindi are orthodox Mohammedans and therefore do not drink alcohol, only tea and cakes were served. This, somehow, was not conducive to seriously conferring with Egyptian producers: nobody, in any case, appeared to regard the occasion as anything but a purely social one.

Mabbie and I were enchanted to meet Kay Kendall at this party. She is a charming girl, totally devoid of conceit: it was quite apparent that she had no idea her beauty was that of the young Garbo. Mabbie recalled to me that she had been dining at the Savoy with her father, Frederick Lonsdale, Ian Hunter and Cedric Hardwicke, one evening when all three gentlemen were somewhat down in the mouth: Kay Kendall entered the restaurant and as soon as the depressed three caught sight of her their eyes lit up and, said Mabbie, "they all looked as if they'd had their faces lifted." Overhearing this remark, Kay (who, incidentally, prefers to be called Kate) turned to Mabbie and said quite seriously and sweetly, "No, really I've never had my face lifted." Mabbie explained about her father and his friends: Kay looked at her in astonishment. "What an extraordinary thing," she said. I have never met an actress less aware of the impression she makes upon people.

With her was Syd Chaplin, who was to play in the film the rôle

of an army officer sympathetic to the revolution but simultaneously bound to Abdullah by an oath of fealty. There was to be, I gathered, a romance between him and the beautiful model or show-girl (inexplicably now called "Ronnie") Miss Kendall was to portray. It seemed to me that this might well be highly convincing as there was more than a spark of romance between Syd and Kay already.

He struck me as far better looking and more full of character than he had been in his father's film, "Limelight." It is quite possible that his profound admiration for Charles Chaplin had had an inhibiting effect upon him. It interested me that, in discussing the great man, Sydney referred to his father as "Chaplin" and spoke of his films as if he were just another Chaplin fan.

After we had hung about the hotel until mid-day the next day, Mr. Ratoff decided it would be pointless to start straightening out the script in Cairo as we would be leaving for Alexandria on the morrow: I couldn't quite follow his argument but, anyway, was glad to have the afternoon off. Mabbie and I went out to look at the city.

We were greatly impressed by the number of young men walking about the streets in pyjamas. Beggars swarmed about us, plucking at our clothing (one importunate old crone gave me a sharp pinch) and crying out for "Bakshcesh!"—a word I had never expected to hear but which suddenly reminded me of "The Voice from the Minaret," with Norma Talmadge and Eugene O'Brien. The voice that summons the faithful to prayer, by the way, is nowadays broadcast over loudspeakers.

Next morning we went to the station to take the train for Alexandria. A rabble of fierce porters—characters from "Hassan"—fought for possession of our luggage, tearing at our suitcases with such ferocity we felt sure they would burst open or have the handles wrenched off; fortunately they proved strong enough to survive the onslaught.

On the journey I had an opportunity to talk to George St. George, who proved to be a most knowledgeable and agreeable chap. He has, as I have said, a comedian's sad face—and he told me he had, in fact, *been* a comedian: before becoming one of Mae West's scriptwriters, he had filmed with Slim Summerville. Of Miss West he spoke with great affection, recalling that, after a remarkable stage career as author, director, producer and actress, she

had first gone to Hollywood to play a comparatively minor part in "Night After Night," with George Raft, and had scored such a success that she was instantly a film star. It was in her next picture, "Diamond Lil," with Gilbert Roland, that she uttered the famous line: "Come up and see me sometime." The people she hoped would never take her up on this invitation were burglars, of whom she had a horror: she told George that every night she "peeked under the bed" to make sure no such type was lurking there. This he found rather endearing in a woman who had so resolutely built up about herself a legend of cool and infrangible self-assurance: he considered her a great character.

Mabbie and I were to stay at the Hotel Cecil in Alexandria. No sooner had we been shown to our rooms than I was summoned to a conference. Gregory Ratoff had elected not to stay at the hotel: he thought that, as his wife, Maria, a Georgian princess, was due to join him in Egypt, it would be far pleasanter for them to have an apartment so he had rented a large and luxurious one from, I was told, an Egyptian gentleman.

There were quite a number of people in the apartment when I arrived: Milo, George St. George, Mr. Ratoff's dark-skinned assistant called Hassan, who looked like a character out of the Arabian Nights, but spoke faultless English (he had trained at the Old Vic), Mr. Ratoff himself, and a good-looking, slim Egyptian, who appeared to be most inappropriately known as "Fatty." I discovered later that his name was Fathy: he is a well-known Egyptian columnist and was able to give much valuable advice on the film, as he had been one of the officers connected with the revolution. In a corner of the room in which the conference was to be held, sat a dark young man, looking pensive.

Gregory, brandishing and slapping a sheaf of papers, opened the conference. "Quiet, quiet, *please*! Now, my friends, here is our story: this king betrayed his country." He looked around the room collecting glances and nods of assent from everybody except the young man in the corner who was staring at the floor. A look of fury spread over Mr. Ratoff's face as he went on: "Yes, the country was betrayed by this horrible man, just as" (his voice rose to a shout) "just as *I* am betrayed by the horrible man who let me this apartment! The new curtains were to be up before my wife arrives. They are not up. Why are they not up? This horrible man must be a crook! The refrigerator was to be working properly.

It is not working properly. It is not working at all. Is not this man a crook? He has betrayed me. And this is not enough! He has insulted me as I never before in all my life was insulted!" Mr. Ratoff was in great form—and he knew it. He was outraged, he was grieved at the villainy that went on in the world: he gave such a splendid performance of nobility betrayed and brought low by evil-doers that it occurred to me he would make a very fine Lear.

When Mr. Ratoff began to run out of words he clutched at his shirt collar, gasped for breath, beat his breast, reeled about and indicated that he was about to collapse with a heart attack. Milo and Fatty went over to him. He fell groaning into Milo's arms. After supporting him for a little while, Milo handed him to Fatty—and when Fatty could bear the burden no longer he handed him back to Milo. Mr. Ratoff must have realized that his big dramatic scene was deteriorating into comedy, for suddenly he tore himself from them and threw himself back into an armchair—a broken man.

We were all a little perturbed—except the dark young man in the corner: he looked up and said mildly: "The new curtains will be up this evening and the refrigerator is working—it only needs to be switched on." He was, I gathered, the landlord.

Mr. Ratoff was in no mood to be mollified. He rallied: "I will not stay in this apartment where I have been insulted. I have been treated like a thief. No! No! I do not stay here. I wanted an apartment—my wife wanted an apartment. But no! If we are to be treated as thieves and robbers, we would rather stay at an hotel. I will go to the Hotel Cecil with you, Rodney—you" (he waved his hand to all the others) "will have my luggage sent there. Come, let us leave this place: I cannot breathe this air."

At the Hotel Cecil, Mr. Ratoff took to his bed: he had the look of an actor who knows he has given a remarkable performance—combined with that of a naughty little boy who fears he has perhaps gone too far.

I asked Milo subsequently what the gross insult was that had been put upon Mr. Ratoff. Milo said he thought it was simply that the landlord had presented Mr. Ratoff with an inventory of the contents of the flat and had asked him to sign an undertaking that he would be responsible for any damage done to the furniture.

Fortunately for everybody, Mme. Ratoff soon arrived. She was full of charm—smiling graciously, like a hostess permanently re-

ceiving guests—and she was able to soothe and calm Gregory. She did not complain at having to stay in an hotel, but she conveyed delicately though definitely that this was not what she had expected. Bets were taken among the unit as to when Gregory would return to the flat he had so dramatically left.

In no time at all Gregory was asking us for advice : here he was, working not only as director but as star of the film, so did we feel that, because of the strain this involved, it would be better if he lived away from us all, in an apartment of his own? To be constantly surrounded with reminders of the film (us, we gathered) would make it impossible for him to relax—and if he could not relax, his nerves would be bad, his temper would be bad, even his work might suffer. He let us understand that for the sake of the film and everyone connected with it he was prepared, if we so advised, to suffer the humiliation of returning to the apartment. We "so advised."

Before the next script conference, Mr. and Mme. Ratoff were installed in the apartment; luscious new curtains, as promised, hung at the windows, the refrigerator worked, and a Greek house-keeper and a Sudanese houseboy of about sixteen constituted the domestic staff. The boy was a delightful creature—but, at first, Mme. Ratoff had a feeling that it would be dangerous to have a "black man" about the place. Later, realizing how amiable and innocent the child was, Mme. Ratoff lost her fear of him and relished his dog-like devotion : the two of them fell very prettily into the roles of an 18th century lady and her little Nubian slave. Eventually, she and Gregory spoke of adopting the boy and taking him back to Hollywood with them : one can only hope that, if the proposition was ever made to him, the small Sudanese did not take it seriously.

While Mr. Ratoff's domestic arrangements were being put in order, we had time to look over the royal yacht and one of the royal palaces which the Egyptian government had placed at Gregory's disposal for the film.

The palace, I understand, was built in about 1880. There was certainly an indication of wealth in the enormous, marble-floored rooms and vistas of rooms, but there was no sign of taste. One quite impressive circular room with columns had its walls decorated with dainty crinolined ladies, who might have been painted by Marcus Stone, and the murals generally were worthier of Totten-

ham Court Road than of Royal Egypt and the king who collected objets d'art. The furniture was, I should say, Edwardian Louis XV, and there was not one comfortable chair in the place.

In Farouk's bedroom, above his plain mahogany bed, was a wedding picture of himself and Narriman—with the bride seated and the bridegroom standing, in a typically Victorian pose. Mr. Ratoff took one look at the bed and decided that it might have been good enough for the King of Egypt to sleep in but would not do at all for Abdullah the Great of Banderia (the name by which we called the Ruritanian kingdom ruled by Ratoff). A new and spectacularly voluptuous bed was immediately ordered—the head of it to bear a large "A" in gold. Wherever the initial "F" for Farouk appeared in the palace and aboard the yacht, this had to be changed to an "A": the alteration was made quite simply by adding a straight stroke to the right-hand side of the "F"—a measure so reasonable and economical that it quite startled me.

The royal yacht, *Mahroussa*, had, I was told, been built to take the Empress Eugenie to the opening of the Suez Canal, and the Empress's piano is still aboard: it stands in a drawing-room, under a bas-relief of ancient Egyptian figures which looked as if it might have come from the prop-room of the St. Margaret's studios, near Twickenham, where 28 years before, I had glimpsed the shooting of a film called "The Shadow of Egypt."

At the first serious script conference—one held at the palace—Mr. Ratoff wondered aloud. "What is wrong with people? Why do they not see in the mind's eye, as I do, what I want?" It seemed that George and I, in preparing the opening scenes, had not seen mind's eye to mind's eye with Gregory. "Not one word, not one goddam word of this can be used," he shouted.

It was a great relief to us when, having run through the script again, Mr. Ratoff declared that two of the scenes were "perfect—brilliant! Not one line must be altered!"

Mr. Ratoff had for the moment forgotten that it was, ultimately, impossible for him to decide what should or should not be altered: that right belonged to and was relentlessly exercised by the Egyptian authorities.

It is typical of the film industry that we did not realize the significance, the really immense political significance, of a series of changes in the story made directly at the "request" of the Egyptian authorities.

In the original script a character known as The General figured as the hero of the revolution, the saviour of his people. Around Christmas-time (1953), we were instructed to write in three or four big scenes for this character—indicating that he was the idol of the army.

A few weeks later we were told to eliminate these scenes : it had been thought best that The General should not actually appear in the film—he would merely be referred to, with awe and reverence, by other characters.

Towards the end of January a further instruction came : there would be no reference to The General in the film. Instead, a character called The Colonel was to appear, and it was to be made clear that he was the brains behind the revolution.

In the light of the sensational developments in the Egyptian political situation the following month, it seems incredible that we did not see in these changes the very clear indication that the Revolution Council was by no means solidly behind General Neguib—that, in fact, the General was in danger of being superseded by Colonel Nasser (which, of course, he was). I have to confess that all we saw was the recurrent infuriating necessity for a further re-write—which we put down to mere vacillation or sheer cussedness on the part of the Egyptian government !

To return to the conference at which Mr. Ratoff was, with the agility of the Egyptian authorities themselves, alternately rejecting and praising the original preliminary script, two points regarding the "story line" were eventually decided upon : the leading lady ought to appear before page 80 and (Mr. Ratoff speaking) "the burning of the village is out."

The burning of a village had been intended as the film's opening scene. Mr. Ratoff now felt that it would be a better idea to open in a cabaret : Kay Kendall, the leading lady, could then appear right away. As a model displaying clothes with two other lovelies (I imagined them as French girls), Kay was to be commanded to join Abdullah at his table.

"This scene," said Mr. Ratoff, "is to be very witty. It is to be a mixture of Noël Coward, George Bernard Shaw and Rodney Ackland—only better."

When he finally read the scene, Mr. Ratoff made no comment on the writing—he merely stormed : "Kay cannot be an *English* girl—they are not popular here. She will have to be Canadian."

Why have you made the other two French girls? Where do we get French girls? From France? That is mad, MAD! Think what it would cost! No! These two girls will be played by Miss Egypt and an Italian girl. Re-write the scene with different accents." I re-wrote it.

Gregory's method of stimulating the collaboration between George St. George and myself was to give us each other's scenes to re-write. Without having been given any clear idea of Mr. Ratoff's conception of the two leading characters (Kay or "Ronnie," as she was called, and Abdullah), George and I would be dispatched to separate cabins aboard the yacht or separate rooms in the palace to attempt to improve upon each other's work. As time went by it became apparent that George and I had quite opposite conceptions of "Ronnie" and Abdullah. Whereas I saw the girl as a warm, bright, sympathetic character, George felt she should be a hard, calculating type—quite a bitch, in fact. When we argued about this, George said, "I don't see why you want to make her a nice girl. She's a model, isn't she? Well, in America all models are tramps!" I explained that in England girls of the very best families often went in for modelling: George was incredulous and shocked. That Kay was a nice girl, he agreed: maybe she shouldn't have been cast as a model? Well, it was too late to do anything about that. We'd have to work out something between his "Ronnie" and mine. As to his Abdullah, this was a character who couldn't open his mouth without making a sophisticated wisecrack: mine was a completely literal-minded character with only a schoolboy's sense of humour and a weakness for practical jokes. Gregory's "advisers" would have to decide which they preferred—but, after a series of conferences, at which assorted Egyptians weighed in with assorted suggestions, no decisions had been taken when shooting on the film started. It is quite usual for film to be shot in snatches completely out of sequence—but it is most unusual for the nature of individual characters to change radically from scene to scene. There was, of course, just a chance that the Egyptian authorities might eliminate Abdullah altogether, as they had eliminated the character of the General, re-name "Ronnie" and convert the film into a tourist-luring musical called "Sweet Nell of Old Nile"; at least, it was fun to imagine they might.

Because of the polyglot unit, shooting was fraught with calami-

tous incidents, of which the most spectacular was the one when, for the ceremonial launching of the royal yacht—after it had been taken over by the revolutionaries—members of the Egyptian government, admirals and other high-ranking officers of the Egyptian Navy and Army assembled aboard.

Mr. Ratoff, in a resplendent uniform as Abdullah and some agitation (justifiable) as director received them like a monarch and was about to allot them their positions when an anxious-looking technician approached and murmured something to him. A horrified expression crossed Gregory's face as he hustled aft with the man. Fifteen minutes dragged by—and then Gregory returned to announce, in accents of despair, that owing to a technical hitch, for which he was not to blame, there could be no launching that day. The bigwigs withdrew in the highest dudgeon and most of us felt this contretemps might well have unpleasant repercussions.

A certain uneasiness developed among all those connected with the picture and poor Gregory began to show signs of exhaustion—which was not surprising considering his colossal task, for in addition to acting and directing, he was struggling to cope with the financial side of the production and keep down the costs.

In the Babel-like confusion of tongues that prevailed, misunderstandings were almost inevitable. One day the unit, in response to a completely incorrect message, presented itself at the palace. Mr. Ratoff was not there. Since his instructions had been for the unit to be aboard the yacht, he had naturally gone down to the vessel: he found it deserted. He had been at a script conference until three o'clock that morning, had snatched an hour or so's sleep and risen again at six to inspect costumes. The thought that his instructions had been, as he must have concluded, disregarded, was too much for him: he became quite ill and had to go home to bed.

The unit sat around at the palace looking glum. There was a rumour that the Egyptian workers on board the yacht had not been paid for three weeks and were threatening to strike, and most of us had money worries arising from the film. My own was that I had received no expenses and my hotel bill was unpaid. I went to look for Mr. El. Guindi.

I found him with several other Egyptians, playing backgammon. It appeared they had telephoned Mr. Ratoff's apartment and had been told to call back in an hour as Mr. Ratoff was

seeing the doctor. I said to Mr. El Guindi that something really must be done about paying us—and he assured me that something would be done. He was very calm and seemed to know that an important development was due at any moment.

It arrived—in the shape of a high-handed cable from the backers who clearly had no conception of the difficulties Gregory was encountering and coping with.

I was told that this ungrateful cable, of which I was only given the gist, was to be sent round to Mr. Ratoff immediately, and I must say my heart bled for him. It bled even more profusely when he appeared that afternoon at the palace. He was not wearing his tarboosh; he looked quite crumpled and so much like an old sailorman that he reminded me of Anna Christie's father.

The afternoon's work over, Gregory and Milo came back to the hotel with me: Gregory was clearly in need of a little sympathy. Slumped in a chair in my room, he said sadly: "Rodney, my friend, a terrible thing has happened; I have been fighting a big battle with these people, a bad battle, and I am tired—tired."

Gregory laid a hand on my arm and shook his head dejectedly, saying, "If I have not been tactful enough with these Egyptians, it is because I have had too much to do. Now at last Boris is coming to help me."

I asked who Boris was—and Gregory told me that he had invited Boris Ingster, another Russian from Hollywood, to come to Egypt to suggest fresh ideas for the story. I was excited at the prospect of meeting him as I knew he had worked with Eisenstein on "The Battleship Potemkin" and "Thunder over Mexico"; I looked forward to an opportunity of discussing with him the Art of the Cinema. (As it happened, no such opportunity arose.) I congratulated Gregory on having secured Mr. Ingster's co-operation.

"Yes, I am sure it will be a good thing," said Gregory. "Boris understands me. He knows what people seem to forget—that I am a fine, subtle actor. I made my name in Tchekov, you know." Gregory was cheering up. He went on: "Why, when I was playing Trofimov—you remember, the perpetual student in 'The Cherry Orchard'?"—I gave such a beautiful, subtle performance in the scene where I make love to a girl while looking for my galoshes that the producer came to me in tears and kissed me, and said, 'If Tchekov were still alive he would kiss you too.' People

should not forget these things. Boris will not forget; we will make a great film together."

I was happy to see that Ratoff was himself again. Reminiscence had completely restored him and in a second or two he was embarking upon one of his long, involved "I-have-something-to-say-of-utmost-importance" speeches—this time leading up to the following pronouncement:

"We must have more subtlety in this film. Rodney, my friend, you will write for me a very fine, very subtle scene. In it, a woman will come to me—Abdullah—and say, 'Oh, my king! The parliament is against you, the peasants are against you and the public opinion is against you!'—and to this I will say" (Gregory rose to his feet, drew himself up and yelled), "'F... the parliament! F... the peasants! And F... the public opinion!' You see what I mean, Rodney, do you not? It will be magnificent."

"Yes, I see what you mean: something really subtle!" I said.

"That is it!" said dear Gregory. "Bring it to the script conference at the palace to-morrow morning." And off he went in high good humour, linking his arm affectionately in Milo's and singing an aria from "Boris Goudonov."

Boris Ingster arrived that very night and we met next day at the script conference. He was one of the calmest Russians I'd ever encountered. He had apparently had time to run through the script and already had some suggestions to make. The first of these was that in the film's opening scene Syd Chaplin should arrive at the cabaret and attempt to assassinate Abdullah.

We agreed that this would strengthen the plot—but it was pointed out that if the change were made, some of the scenes already shot would not make sense.

"Then what about re-shooting?" asked Mr. Ingster.

Gregory Ratoff exploded. "Do you realize what you ask me to do?" he roared. "You ask me to cut my own throat—to play into the hands of the backers!" He rose from his seat, banged on the table, glared at us. "It is too much!" He fumbled in a pocket and produced the cable that had arrived the day before. "You shall hear the abusive things they have said." He unfolded the cable and read out its contents.

I had always had an affection for Gregory Ratoff: admittedly he could play the buffoon at times, but there was an endearing warmth about him to which one was bound to respond. Now, as

he read out the cable, I found myself admiring him wholeheartedly: that cable was couched in such terms that beside it Gregory's letter to one of the big shots (with which he had shocked us on the day of our arrival) seemed, in retrospect, no more than a love lyric.

We were all a little stunned by Gregory's overwhelming frankness—and we all muttered words of sympathy.

"Yesterday, this horrible cable came," said Gregory, crumpling it in his hand. "Look what I have written in my diary." He took a diary from his pocket and searched through it for the right day. "Here it is. Wednesday. Rodney, my friend, read what I have written—read it aloud."

I took the diary and read: "Wednesday. This is a memorable day in my life. In Egypt they think I have met my Waterloo—but we shall see who retreats from Moscow."

Mr. Ingster, with a twinkle in his eye, said something to Gregory in Russian. Gregory shrugged, smiled, threw out his hands and asked: "So—now that you know, what do we do?"

It was decided that no re-shooting could, in the circumstances, be done. We would alter the opening scene in accordance with Mr. Ingster's suggestion and follow it up with a scene in which Syd Chaplin is arrested, thrown into jail and beaten up. George and I were sent off to get busy on these innovations.

On my way back to the hotel that evening, I met two rather anxious ladies who asked me how things were going. They were Mme. Pinès and Mrs. White, two accomplished linguists (Mrs. White had been an actress, too) who had been engaged to teach the Egyptian members of the cast to speak English lines. I told them Mr. Ingster had made some very good suggestions for improving the story and seemed both intelligent and reasonable. Would he be suggesting any economies, they wanted to know. I said I had not heard this discussed, and left them. I could see why they might be a little worried: they probably felt, as I certainly did, that there was very little point in teaching the Egyptian actors English, as all their voices were to be dubbed into American, anyway.

I told Mabbie of the day's happenings and she was full of sympathy for Gregory. We both felt it was a great pity that the producers did not understand him better: I had never taken his outbursts quite seriously but it was obvious that somebody had done—and we wondered who it could be.

His letter to Milan had, of course, been a bit much, and Gregory had been less than tactful in his dealings with several of the backers' representatives—especially with a short, dynamic, businesslike American who periodically dropped in on us at Alexandria from Cairo, apparently to keep an eye on the film's finances.

At a conference one day, Gregory was berating this American because the girls at Abdullah's court were not pretty enough. For some reason, Gregory elected to express himself in French. He kept shouting that Abdullah must always be surrounded with "belles femmes"—whereas the ones available were all "laides, laides." Maybe the American misunderstood this word: anyway, he heatedly protested. Gregory continued to rant and roar. Suddenly the American went up to him and said coldly and quietly: "Quit shouting at me."

Gregory fell back in astonishment. "My friend," he said, "you must not take notice of me if I shout—it is only my way. Look here—here is my old friend George St. George. He writes for me pages and pages and I shout at him. Here is Rodney, my old friend, too—he writes pages and pages and I shout at him. Are they angry against me? No, no, no. They understand that it is only my way. They do not suffer."

"How can you tell?" asked the American sombrely: he was obviously amused at the expression of alarm that came into Gregory's eyes and at the pleading voice in which our dear dragon said to George and myself, "But it is true, isn't it my friends? You do not suffer?" We had no hesitation at all in assuring him that we did not—that we understood perfectly that it was only his way. The American, whom I suspected of putting on a tough act, turned away with a short laugh—a by no means unamiable short laugh—and winked at George and me as if to say he realized the old so-and-so might grow on him, too, in time.

On the very last day of my stay in Egypt (I had contracted to work on the film for six weeks) word came from the Egyptian government that, while they approved the revised opening scene—in which Syd Chaplin would attempt the assassination of Abdullah—they could not possibly agree to the scene in which Mr. Chaplin was to be jailed and beaten up: Mr. Chaplin, after all, was playing an Egyptian officer and it would be damaging to the army's prestige if the public were given the impression that an officer could be subjected to such treatment.

Poor Mr. Ratoff tore his hair. "All the time it goes on—change and chop, change and chop!" he cried to Boris Ingster. "How are we ever going to get anywhere—how are we ever to get the story right?" It was a question to which Mr. Ingster could give no answer.

That evening, Gregory dined with Mabbie and me at the hotel: it must have been obvious to the entire restaurant that Mr. Ratoff was unhappy. He was sighing gustily and looking at the two of us as if we were his dearest friends from whom he was parting in the sad knowledge that we should never meet again. He might have been giving us a last sorrowful blessing, for he spoke (as if from the heart) in a very low voice; this was a good thing as, in point of fact, he was quietly but bitterly bewailing the behaviour of the Egyptian authorities.

"We have tried, have we not, my friend, to please them," he said, "but it is impossible. They know nothing of the making of films—of the work, work, work that goes into it. They are ruining me. They are driving me mad. *This* story is not right, *that* story is not right they say—and it is easy to say. But who can find for them the right story?"

As he was talking a gulli-gulli man, whose business it was to entertain the guests with incredible feats of sleight of hand, came over to our table. Mr. Ratoff looked at him as if fearing he brought further bad news from the Egyptian authorities. The man smiled, stretched out an arm and produced from the breast of Mr. Ratoff's dinner jacket a live, cheeping, baby chicken. Gregory was enchanted. His face lit up. He laughed and turned to me: "Rodney," he cried, "it is *such* a fellow we need on the picture—a gulli-gulli man!" "But Gregory," I said, "don't you see? Only a magician could have done what you've done, in the circumstances—you *are* a gulli-gulli man!"

Back in England we arrived home expecting a chaos of unpacked crates. We found instead a tidy flat. Miss Vaughan had been there! With her genius for friendship (as well as for organization) and her breath-taking indomitability Olwen had provided everything we could wish for to welcome us back—except a film-contract. Perhaps to console us she had left an invitation to a private run-through of the life story of a mediaeval Japanese tart in eighteen reels.

XX

THE SCREENWRITER'S FAREWELL

"Yours for ever ..."

Six months after we returned from Egypt, I met Gregory Ratoff in London; he told me that shooting on "Abdullah the Great"—and re-shooting—was still "in progress." This, I imagined, would mean that by now there must be an immense amount of footage in existence—and I wondered if anything of mine would be left in the completed film.

Mabbie was once called in to work on the script of Victor Hugo's "Toilers of the Sea"—and when the film eventually appeared, as "Sea Devils," all that remained of her contribution to the epic was the one word "rumoured." Pondering this illuminating example of what can happen to a script in the course of its being put on celluloid, I saw little prospect of making a "come-back" in films as a result of my work on "Abdullah the Great."

Times were thin—and Mother was again becoming stocking-conscious. I turned snappy and said I thought it hardly suitable for a lady of 79 to be going around selling stockings; Mother replied, "Well, darling, instead of *your* going around telling people not to mention the cinema in your presence, why don't you write a book about the experiences that made you feel like that?"

"A *book*?" I said. "But I've never written a book in my life and I just can't imagine myself churning out all those thousands and thousands of words."

"You could get somebody to churn them out with you," she suggested. "What about that friend of yours who's a film critic and writes articles on films—Elspeth March?"

"Elspeth March," I corrected her, "was Stewart Granger's wife and is an actress. If you mean Elspeth Grant, I think that's a very sound notion. I'll telephone her and ask if she'd write a book with me." I did, and she would.

The day Elspeth and I put our names to the publisher's contract,

Bob Whitehead signed me up to write two plays based on themes I had been carrying about in my head and a notebook for years. Mabbie and I drank to a future in which film studios and script conferences would have no part. We decided there could be no better way of celebrating than by going to a theatre.

As I scanned a newspaper entertainments column, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," leapt out of it and hit me in the eye. It was being revived at the Everyman, Hampstead, and this was the last day of its run. I couldn't resist it. Mabbie, whom I had dragged all over London to see my favourite old films, accompanied me into the Underground, and from South Kensington to Hampstead I delivered a lecture on the significance of "Dr. Caligari" in the Art of the Cinema.

The film was just beginning when we took our seats. The opening scene I know by heart. There is the scared-looking old gentleman with the skinny throat and high collar, listening unwillingly in the twilight to a monstrous tale of terror and woe told by a haunted young man with a fard-laden face. A white-clad figure, with heavily mascaraed eyes staring blindly, glides towards them...

Whispers exploded all over the cinema. "Lil Dagover—that's Lil Dagover!" "Who?" "Lil Dagover. No, she *wasn't* a coster! It's spelt L-I-L not short for anything."

Suppressing my irritation I tried to shut my ears to everything but the musical accompaniment on the double turn-table gramophone...

Lil is passing the bench now and the young man with the fard-laden face shudders back against the wall and grips the old man's arm. Under a spell, the old man stares and listens.

And I am under a spell too. "The old magic, the old hypnosis, is at work again.

"Oh God, how beautiful, how magical it still is!" a voice in my mind says, "Cinderella of the Arts, Circe—Messalina!—whatever you've become on the surface, you're the same at heart, and nothing fundamentally can change you! It's no good pretending or kidding myself any longer, I've always adored you and I love you still!" At least, if the voice in my mind didn't say exactly that, it sounded suspiciously like it. Subconsciously I was already concocting plans for using Cinemascope in a neo-expressionist technique.

A sub-title faded in. "That is my fiancée."

There was a guffaw of laughter and an echoing titter from immediately behind. THEY had followed us, even to the heights of Hampstead.

I sat seething, formulating various pompous rebukes, which finally came out as "For God's sake, shut up laughing."

"Shut up laughing—why should we?" said They. I was stumped for a reply. Umbrageously They persisted: "Why shouldn't we laugh if we want to?" (Pause.) "What d'you expect us to do—cry?"

"Yes."

"Well, why aren't *you* crying, then?"

"I probably shall be in a minute," I said.

THE END



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